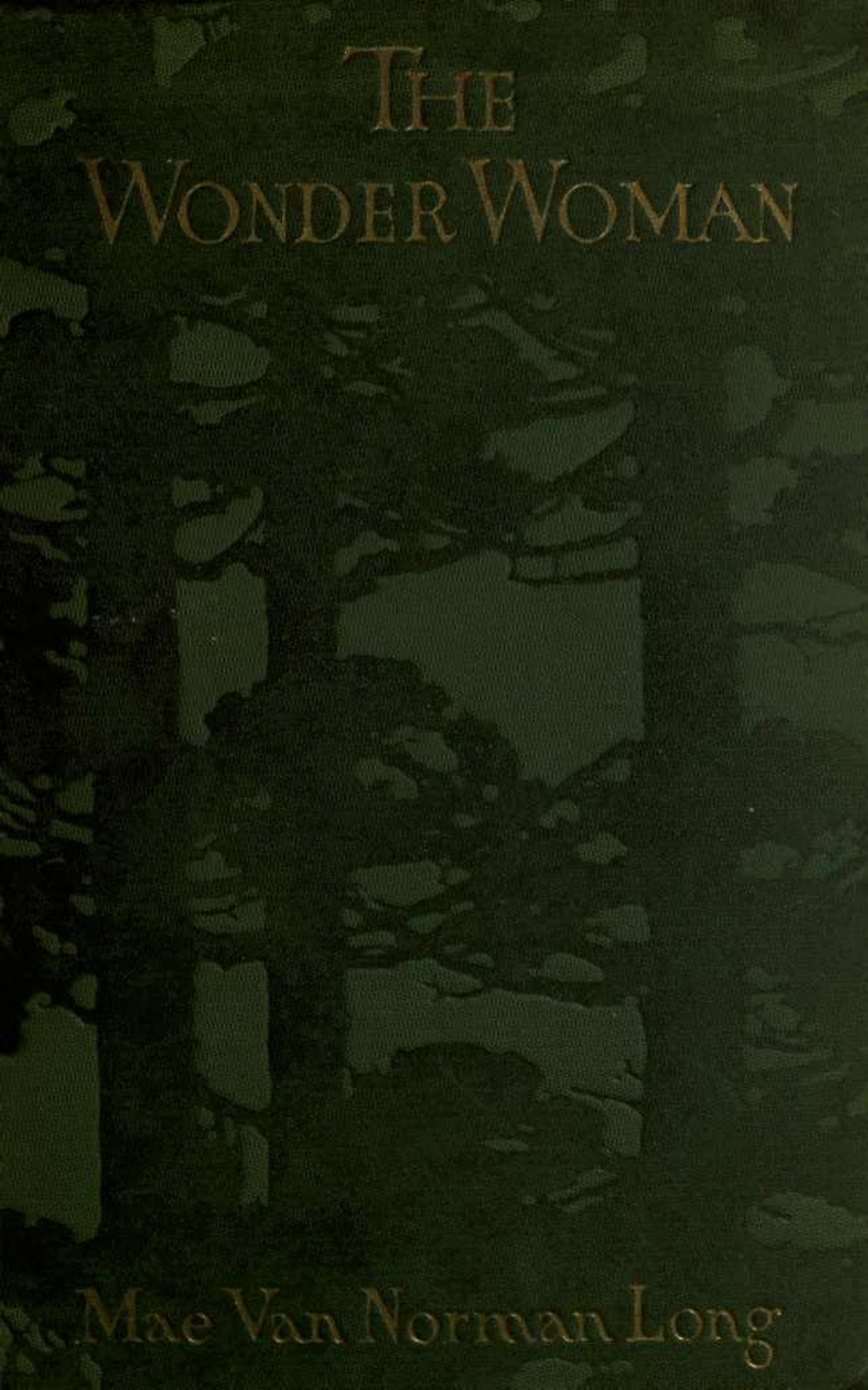
The Wonder Woman



Mae Van Norman Long

1491E
L35
50

Ski
from
Henry

1919

THE HEART OF THE WOODS

The WONDER WOMAN

By MAE VAN NORMAN LONG

Illustrated by
J. MASSEY CLEMENT

THE PENN PUBLISHING
COMPANY PHILADELPHIA
1917

COPYRIGHT
1917 BY
THE PENN
PUBLISHING
COMPANY

The Wonder Woman

TO
LAWSON

2136693

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	Two Women	9
II	Haidee	28
III	I Fell Some Trees	37
IV	Wanza	46
V	The Lead	52
VI	Captain Grif	65
VII	Wanza Bakes a Cake	80
VIII	Gipsying	95
IX	The Big Man	114
X	Jingles Brings a Message	122
XI	The Kickshaw	132
XII	In Shop and Dingle	147
XIII	Deficiencies	160
XIV	Jack of All Trades	166
XV	I Begin to Wonder About Wanza	178
XVI	We Have an Adventure	190
XVII	The Dream in the Dingle	214
XVIII	"Thank You, Mr. Fixing Man"	237
XIX	Bereft	255

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
XX	"Perhaps I Shall Go Away"	265
XXI	Fate's Final Javelin	274
XXII	Renunciation	294
XXIII	When Christmas Came	310
XXIV	"The Flower Will Bloom Another Year"	319
XXV	My Surprise	330
XXVI	The Old Swimming Hole	344
XXVII	My Wonder Woman	363

ILLUSTRATIONS

	PAGE
The heart of the woods	*Frontispiece*
"I was only taking a short cut" . . .	*Opposite* 22
The gypsy tossed back her cape	" 100
A sudden yearning sprang up	" 193
"I'm grateful and pleased"	" 328

THE WONDER WOMAN

CHAPTER I

TWO WOMEN

"DO you see her now, Mr. David?"

I nodded, pointing into the coals. "I see a lion, and an old witch, and a monkey. I don't see any woman."

"There! There!" I cried. "She's just going through the postern gate. Oh, she's gone, lad! Never mind! Next time you may see her."

"And is she prettier'n Wanza, Mr. David?"

"Perhaps not prettier," I responded. "Wanza looking out from beneath the pink-lined umbrella on her peddler's cart is very charming, indeed. But the woman I see in the fire is—oh, she's altogether different!"

This was the customary tenor of my conversation with Joey as we sat before our fire of pine knots of an evening. The lad would point out to me queer kaleidoscopic creatures he saw deep

in the heart of the pine fire; but his young eyes never saw the face I beheld there, and so I was obliged to describe my wonder woman to him.

It was not strange that Joey should share my confidence in this fashion. He had been my sole companion since the night four years before when I had found him—poor tiny lad—sobbing on the door-step of a shack some three miles down the river. I had lifted him to my shoulder and entered the shack to find there a dying woman. The woman died that night, but before she passed away she gave the child to me, saying: "He is only a waif! I took him from my poor brother when he died over on the Sound, about six months ago. My brother was a fisherman. He picked the child up on the beach one morning after a fierce storm a year ago. I was meaning to keep the boy always, poor as I be. But now —you take Joey, mister,—he'll be a blessing to you!"

A blessing! I said the words over to myself as I carried the boy home that night. I said them to myself when I awakened in the morning and looked down at him cradled in the hollow of my arm. I had been out of conceit with life. For me the world was "jagged and broken" in very truth. But looking down at the young

stranger I thrilled with the sudden desire to smooth and shape my days again. To stand sure! And here was a companion for me! I was through with living alone!

I went to the window, threw it wide, and saw the dawn rosy in the east. A mountain bluebird that had a nest in a hole in a cottonwood tree hard by was perched on a serviceberry bush beside the window. I heard its song with rapture. I was smiling when I turned back to the bunk where I had left the child. The child was smiling too. He sat straight up among the blankets, his eyes were fixed on the bird, and he was holding out his little arms. I lifted him and carried him to the window, and he lisped: "I love birdie! I love you!"

And so Joey became my boy.

It was not only in the heart of the pine fire that I saw the radiant creature I described to Joey. When I looked from my workshop door at twilight across the shadowy river to the cool purple peaks of the mountains, the nebular mist arising seemed the cloud-folds of her garments. And when I lay on my back at noon time, in the cedar grove, gazing upward through the shivering green dome at the sky, I always dreamed of the splendor of her eyes.

I grew to wonder how I should meet her. Some way, I always pictured myself astride my good cayuse, Buttons, on the river road returning from Roselake village, gay in my holiday clothes, with a freshly shaven face, and a bag of peppermints in my pocket for Joey.

As it fell out I was in my shop by the river at work on a cedar chest. I was garbed in a dark-blue flannel shirt and blue overalls, and needed a hair-cut sadly. I heard a sound and looked up. "She has come!" I said to myself. "Out of the land of dreams she has come to me!"

A young woman stood before me. The face I saw was oval and flawless. The cheeks were a delicate pink. Her lips were vivid, her eyes luminous as stars. Her silky, lustrous hair was bound with a broad band of blue ribbon. Although her riding skirt was torn, her blouse soiled, although she was dusty and disheveled, with shadows of weariness about her splendid eyes, her manner was that of a young princess as she addressed me.

"This place is for sale, I understand?"

I had not thought of selling the few acres that remained of the hundred-and-sixty-acre homestead I had taken up eight years before; but I

was so overcome with awe and confusion, that I stammered forth:

"Why, no—that is, I think not! I shall sell some time, I dare say."

Her face showed a flash of amusement and then grew thoughtful.

"It is a desirable place," she murmured, half to herself.

I knew then she had come to the shop by the yew path—the path that runs beneath the trailing yews and winds in and out like a purple-brown ribbon near the spring, where the moss is downy and green, and the bracken is high, and the breeze makes a sibilant sound in the rushes. I straightened my shoulders, laid aside my plane, and rolled down my sleeves. Thus far I had not fully appraised my visitor, having fallen a prey to the creeping paralysis of shyness at my first glance, but now, grown bolder, I stole a hardier look at her face. I saw the scarlet lips, the brilliant eyes, and the ivory forehead beneath the midnight hair. I saw the rose tint on her cheek, the tan on her tender throat where the rolled-back collar left it bare. I saw—and I breathed: "God help me!" deep in my heart; and there must have crept a warmth that was disquieting into my gaze, for she lowered her eyes swiftly,

and slid her hand, in its riding glove, caressingly along the smooth surface of the cedar chest between us.

"What beautiful wood," she said softly. "You are a carpenter—a craftsman," she amended. "How wonderful to work with wood like this."

"Christ was a carpenter," a voice—a wee voice announced from behind us. Joey had stolen into the shop through the rear window as was his custom, and curled up on my work bench among the shavings.

"Who told you, lad?" I queried, being used to Joey's terse and unexpected utterances.

My wonder woman looked at him sharply. Her black brows came together as she surveyed him, and she did not smile. Joey stared and stared at her, until I thought he never would have done, and she continued to scrutinize him. I saw her eyes wander over his attire. Poor lad—his collection of wearing apparel was motley enough —an old hunting coat of mine that almost covered him, a pair of trousers unmistakably cut over, a straw hat that was set down so far on his brown head that his ears had perforce to bear the weight; a faded shirt, and scuffed out shoes. But Joey's scrutiny was more persistent than the one ac-

corded him, and presently, my wonder woman was tricked into speech.

"Well?" she murmured, her lips relaxing.

Joey gave a great sigh, kicked up his heels like a fractious colt, and rolled over among the shavings. "Gracious Lord!" was his comment, delivered in awed tones.

"Joey!" I gasped, turning. But Joey was slipping, feet first, through the window. I caught him by the trousers and gave him a surreptitious shake, as I lowered him wriggling to the ground. He rolled over, rose to his knees; his brown eyes, big and soft, looked up at me affectionately; his lips parted in a grin of understanding.

"I'll put the potatoes on, Mr. David," he vouchsafed, and vanished.

The beautiful face was questioning when I turned back. "Mr. David," she repeated. "He is not your boy then?"

I hesitated. "No," I said slowly. Somehow, I was in no mood to tell her Joey's story at that moment.

"Joey has the manners of a young Indian," I apologized. "I hope he did not annoy you."

"Children never annoy me," she replied.

A tiny dimple played at one corner of her

mouth and died suddenly as the half smile left her face. She bent her riding-whip between her hands and a look of distress came into her eyes.

"I am wrong, then, about this place being for sale? I saw a sign-board back there on the road. It said 'For Sale' in bold black letters. There was a big hand that pointed this way."

A light broke in on me.

"It must be Russell's old ranch on Hidden Lake," I said. "To be sure, that is for sale. It has been for sale ever since I can remember."

I saw her eyes brighten.

"There is a place I can buy, then? What is it like—this Hidden Lake?"

"It is a mere pond, hidden in the thickets. It can be reached from the river. If you can find the lead you can pole in with a canoe. It's a famous place for ducks. The tules almost fill it in summer. There's a good spring on the place, and I guess the soil is fair. One could raise vegetables and berries."

"I don't want to raise anything."

I fancied her lip curled.

"No—no—why, I dare say not! How stupid of me," I murmured.

She flirted her whip impatiently.

"Is there a road I can take?"

"I will show you," I replied, and she walked out of the shop as if anxious to be off.

She paused in the cedar thicket beyond, and I joined her. We could see the river shining like silver gauze through the green latticed walls of the grove, and the sky above the steeples of the trees was amethyst and gray. The sun was low in the west, and the shadows lay purple along the wood aisles.

It was a magical May day. Hawthorn and serviceberry bushes waved snowy arms along the river bank and dropped white petals in the stream, the birch trees dangled long festoons of moss above the water, balm o' Gileads shed their pungent perfume abroad, and the honeysuckle and wild clematis hung from the limbs of the slender young maples.

I held aside the underbrush for my wonder woman that she might pass, and we went through the cedar thicket, threaded our way through aspens and buck brush, and reached the trailing yews that were bending to dip their shining prisms in the spring.

"This is the yew path," I explained, breaking the silence that we had maintained since leaving the shop. "It winds through the meadow and joins a trail that skirts Nigger Head mountain.

Follow the trail, and it will take you to Hidden Lake."

The soft neighing of a horse interrupted me. I peered through the buck brush, and glimpsed a bay mare tethered to the meadow bars. My companion gave a soft chirrup and pushed on before me. She had the mare's bridle in her hand, and was stroking the animal's nose when I reached her side.

I said, "Allow me," and offered my hand for her foot. She glanced at my hand, looked into my face, and smiled slowly as if amused. I felt the hot blood mount to my brow, and then her foot pressed my palm, and she was in the saddle, and her mare was wheeling.

"Good Sonia," I heard her murmur, and saw her gauntleted hand steal along the arching neck. She bent to me. The grace of her supple figure, the vital alluring face, her baffling beautiful eyes, her ripe lips with their dimpled corners, were sweet as life to me. For a moment our eyes met. She said gratefully: "Thank you. My ride will be splendid beneath those whispering yews."

Of a sudden my hands grew cold, my tongue stiffened in my throat, and my eyes smarted. She was going. I had no power to detain her, no sophisticated words to cajole her. I stared

after her, and saw her ride away through the swaying meadow-grass to the yew path, the sun dappling her blue riding-skirt, and the breeze lifting and swaying her bonny tresses.

When I went indoors after a retrospective half-hour beside the spring, I found Joey in the grip of intense excitement. The table in the front room was laid for three, there was a roaring fire in the kitchen stove, and Joey's face was crimson as he stood on a stool at the sink turning the boiling water off a kettle of potatoes.

"I've made squatty biscuits like you showed me once," he volunteered in a loud whisper, "and stewed apples. And, Mr. David—I've hung a clean towel over the wash-bench, and scoured the basin with rushes."

I looked at Joey. Out in the woods I had undergone a savage battle with my old self that had walked out of the shadows and confronted me. I had remembered things—submerged, well-forgotten things; I had exhumed skeletons from their charnel house—skeletons long buried; I had seen faces I had no wish to see, heard voices, the music of whose tones I could not sustain with equanimity; I had suffered. But as I looked at Joey, the futile little friend who loved me, and saw his pitiful efforts to please, the ice

went out of my heart, and the fever out of my brain. I turned aside to the window and stood looking out with tightening throat.

Joey came and hovered near my elbow.

"There are only two pieces of gingerbread, Mr. David. I've put them on, and you can just say you don't believe in giving children sweets."

I laid my arm across the lad's shoulders. I looked down into the honest brown eyes seeking mine for approval. The pressure of the two small rough hands on my arm was comforting.

"You're a splendid provider, Joey," I cried. "But you may eat your gingerbread, my boy. There will be no guest. She has gone on to Hidden Lake."

Joey looked aghast. His jaw dropped, and his eyes grew black with disappointment.

"And I've sweetened the apple sauce with white sugar, and gone and wasted all that butter in those biscuits!"

I strolled into the front room and viewed the preparations. There was a large bunch of lupine in the big blue bowl in the center of the table, and all our best china was set forth in brave array. The bread-board I had carved graced one end of the table; at the other, Joey had arranged the two thick slabs of gingerbread on a

pressed glass comport, a paper napkin beneath. I was smiling as I stood there, but I had an uncomfortable feeling that all was not well with Joey. A sound from the kitchen attracted me. I went toward it. Joey leaned across the sink, his face buried in the roller towel. His young shoulders were heaving.

"I wanted her—oh, I wanted her to stay!" he blubbered.

I knew not what to say to comfort my lad, and so I said nothing. I caught up the pail and went outside to the spring for water.

I had filled my pail and was stooping to gather a handful of cress when I heard the sharp click of wheels in the underbrush behind me. Some one was driving over the uneven ground that lay between the cabin and the workshop. I looked around. A girl sitting beneath a pink-lined, green umbrella, in a two-wheeled cart, waved her whip at me. I straightened up, dropped the cress, and ran through the buck brush after her.

"Wait, wait, Wanza," I cried.

I heard her say: "Whoa, Rosebud!" And the buckskin pony she was driving curveted and pawed the ground and set the green paper rosettes on its harness bobbing coquettishly as she pulled it up.

"Were you coming to the cabin, Wanza?" I asked, as I reached the cart.

"Whoa, Rosebud! No, I wasn't to-night, Mr. Dale—I was only taking a short cut through your field."

She leaned out from beneath the shadow of her pink-lined umbrella and smiled at me. Seldom it was that Wanza smiled at me like that. Friends we were—friends of years' standing—but Wanza was chary of her smiles where I was concerned, and I must confess I found her frowns piquant enough.

The day that passed without Wanza whistling from her peddler's cart at my door seemed more cheerless than usual. Wanza peddled everything, from shoe laces to linen dusters. She was the apple of her father's eye, the pride of the village, and the delight of the steamboat men on the river. Ever since I had known her she had been her father's housekeeper. Her mother had died when Wanza was a baby. And she and her father lived alone in a funny little house, flanked by a funny little garden, on the edge of the village.

"Wanza," I cried eagerly, "come in to supper with Joey and me."

I looked up at her pleadingly. Her charming

"I WAS ONLY TAKING A SHORT CUT"

elf-face continued to smile down at me. She shook her head slowly.

"Please," I begged.

Gradually the smile left her face, a shrewd look replaced it.

"I can make you a cake," she began hesitatingly, "if you've got any brown sugar in the cabin."

"We don't want you to bake for us, Wanza—we have a good meal laid out, and we want you to honor us by sharing it."

"Glory! Is that it, Mr. David Dale? Well, I'll stay. Not," she added quickly, "that I wouldn't be too tickled to make you a cake, only—"

"Only—Wanza?"

"Only it's great to be invited, with all the supper ready before hand and waiting—it sure is!"

"You usually earn your supper with us, girl," I said, as we walked toward the cabin. "There is no one can bake such cakes as yours, and as for your cherry pies—well, I have no words!"

She tossed her head. And then catching sight of a long-tailed chat, tumbling and rollicking above a hawthorn thicket, she stopped, her head poised high, her delicate subtle chin lifted, her expression rapt. All unconscious of my eyes

she began making a funny little noise in her throat:

"Crr—crr—whrr—tr—tr—tr—"

It was pure felicity to look at Wanza Lyttle as she stood thus. She wore a gown of pink cotton, and her tangled maize-colored hair was looped back from her face with a knot of vivid rose-pink ribbon. Her wide-brimmed beribboned hat hung on her shoulders. Her collar was rolled away from a throat of milk. Her sleeves were tucked up, exposing brown, slender arms. Her feet were encased in white stockings and sandals. She was a picturesque, daring figure. And her face!—it was like a flame in a lamp of marble.

Her father, old Griffith Lyttle, was fond of dilating on the beauty of his daughter to me. Once he said: "She do be the prettiest young gal astepping—but, man, I reckon she'll see trouble with that face o' hers. It's the face as goes with a hot temper." Looking at her now it was difficult to associate anything but loveliness of disposition with her face, which seemed at this moment fairly angelic.

"The chat has a variety of songs, Wanza," I ventured. "He is laughing at you. Unless

you can caw like a crow, and mew like a cat, and bark like a dog you can't attract him."

"I like him because he is so bouncing and jolly," the girl answered. "I like bouncing, jolly people, Mr. Dale."

We walked on to the cabin. When we entered the kitchen and Joey saw us, he gave a shout of joy.

"Now, I'd liever have Wanza to supper than the other woman, Mr. David," he vouchsafed. "I like the other woman, course I do, but I ain't used of her yet."

I refrained from meeting Wanza's eyes. I went to the stove and took the biscuits from the oven with assiduous care. But when we were seated at the table, Wanza in the post of honor at the head, she leaned across the battered tea-things, rapped smartly on the table to attract my attention and demanded:

"What woman did Joey mean by 'the other woman,' Mr. Dale?"

I coughed. "Why—er—only a strange lady who stopped at the workshop to enquire if this place were for sale. She saw Russell's old sign at the crossroads, and, as she explained, thought the hand pointed to Cedar Dale."

Wanza looked at me intently; an interesting gleam came into her big eyes.

"What sort of a looking person was she, Mr. Dale?"

I reached out, helped myself to a biscuit, spread it with butter, and answered with assumed nonchalance:

"Oh—so so! She went on to Hidden Lake, following my directions."

Happening to glance across at Joey I surprised a peculiar expression on his face. I saw astonishment written there and a look almost of chagrin in his eyes.

"Why, Mr. David," he burst forth, "I been thinking sure she was our wonder—"

I saved the situation by springing from my seat and pointing out of the window. "Look, look, Wanza and Joey! There is a willow goldfinch on that little spruce tree yonder. See his yellow body, his black wings and tail! Isn't he very like a canary? I heard his song this afternoon—I told you, did I not, lad? Hm!—he has the most charming song—sweet as his disposition. And his flight is wonderfully graceful!—the poetry of motion."

When we went back to our seats I was careful to steer the conversation into safer channels.

That night at bed-time, Joey confidentially said to me:

"I won't tell Wanza that the new woman is our wonder woman—'cause she mightn't like it. Anyhow, is she any more of a wonder woman than Wanza, Mr. David?"

It took me many months to answer that question satisfactorily to myself.

CHAPTER II

HAIDEE

ONCE, years ago, when I was a lad, in an old volume of poems in my father's library I came across a steel engraving of a beautiful woman. She had a small head with raven black tresses bound smoothly about her brow with a fillet, but twisted back over her ears and ending in ringlets over her shoulders. She had big dark eyes, a tiny mouth, a slim white throat, and infinitesimally small hands and feet. Her name was Haidee. I think her feet fascinated me most; for she wore shoes unlike any I had ever seen, ending in high curving points at the toes. She was a most distracting, elusive personality.

When my wonder woman placed her foot in my palm, and mounted her mare at my meadow bars, to myself I muttered: "Haidee." So, the following morning, in answer to Joey's query: "What's her name, Mr. David?" I answered "Haidee," and grinned at the lad sheepishly

through the smoke that arose from the griddle I was greasing with bacon rind.

Joey, giving the cake batter in the yellow pitcher furtive sly dabs with the iron spoon when he thought me unaware, looked grave.

"It don't sound nice. It sounds like that name you say sometimes—"

"Ssh!"

"When you're mad," finished Joey adroitly.

I shoved the stove lid into place beneath the hot griddle, and motioned to Joey to bring the yellow pitcher. While I poured out the foamy batter, Joey kept silence, watching the sizzling process with fascinated eyes, but when I took the pancake-turner in hand and opened the window to let the smoke escape, he spoke again:

"It's bad for her, ain't it, having a name like that?"

"It isn't her real name, Joey. It's a name I bestowed upon her. It seemed to belong to her someway. We shall never see her again, so it does not matter."

"We'll see her again, Mr. David, if she buys Russell's old ranch."

I paused midway to the table, the cake-turner heaped with steaming cakes in my hand. I stared at Joey. Curiously I'd forgotten the

possibility of Haidee becoming my neighbor. My wrist trembled, the cakes slipped to the floor. Joey pounced upon them, bore them to the sink and rinsed them painstakingly in the pail of fresh spring water.

"I like cold cakes," he was saying manfully, when I awoke to the situation.

"So does the collie. No, no, lad—we may not be living in affluence, but we don't have to economize on corn cakes." I laughed boisterously and patted his shoulder. "My cedar chests are selling, and my book—my nature story—is almost completed—why, soon we shall be turning up our noses at flapjacks!"

"At flapjacks!" Joey cried incredulously, making a dash for the yellow pitcher.

We were half through breakfast before he spoke again, and then he ventured tentatively: "Suppose she'll come to-day?"

"Who, Joey?"

"Her—the—woman. The one that made me swear when I saw her in the workshop."

"Oh, I'd forgotten your behaviour in the shop, Joey! It was reprehensible—it was rude—"

Joey nodded. "I forgot I was a human bein'."

He put his elbows on the table, sunk his chin

in his hands, and regarded me. I raised my coffee-cup hurriedly, drained the contents, and coughed spasmodically, Joey's eyes widening in concern.

Two days after this conversation with Joey, as, butterfly-net in hand, I was crossing the ploughed field back of the cabin at noon returning from a collecting trip, I saw the bent figure of a man approaching along the river-road. He carried a sack of flour on his back and he walked with his head so far forward that his chin almost touched his knees. I was feeling particularly jubilant, having taken four Electas, six Zerenes and two specimens of Breuner's Silver-spot, and I accosted him lustily: "Good day, Lundquist."

He attempted to straighten up, found the effort of no avail, and nodded. I rested on the bars and he came slowly toward me. His red face was so knotted and twisted that his very eyes seemed warped askew beneath his ugly freckled forehead. His old hands were horny and purple-veined, his legs spindling and bowed. Poor old derelict! Hapless, hard old man! He lived high up on Nigger Head mountain alone with the birds and squirrels. How he subsisted was a mystery. But he always had tobacco to smoke, and a corn-cob pipe to smoke

it in. This fact comforted me, when I fell to musing on his meagre estate.

"It's a fine day, Lundquist," I continued.

He came closer, halted, and peered up at me.

"Ya, it ban."

"Been to town?"

"Ya—I been to town." He took his old black pipe from his mouth and crept closer. "Last night," he stuttered, in his rasping broken accent, "last night I saw a light, Mr. Dale—a light—down thar."

He pointed with his pipe-stem over his shoulder.

"A light? Do you mean you saw a light from your cabin?"

"Ya—in the old shack on Hidden Lake." He chuckled. "Thar been no light thar fer three year. The wood rats they eat up the furniture ole Russell leave. Place sold—maybe?"

I saw Joey watching me miserably during dinner. I ate like an automaton, and never once did I speak. Afterward it was no better. I took my book and sat on a bench outside the cabin. Joey's voice soaring high above the rattle of the dishes in the sink; a red-shafted flicker hammering noisily on a pine tree before the door, saluting me with his "kee-yer, kee-yer"; the

whistle of the Georgie Oaks at the draw-bridge, were all heard as in a dream. I was back in the workshop with Haidee, I heard her eager question: "There is a place I may buy, then?" I tried to picture to myself Russell's old cabin metamorphosed by that radiant presence. It required a daring stretch of the imagination to vision anything so improbable.

The valley which lies like an emerald green jewel in the very lap of the mountains in this section of Idaho, is watered by innumerable streams which it seems presumptuous to call rivers, and honeycombed with tiny blue lakes, their entrance from the rivers so concealed by tangles of birches and high green thickets and clumps of underbrush that their existence is practically unknown, save to the settlers along the adjacent rivers and to a few zealous sportsmen who make portages from lake to lake, dragging their canoes across the intervening marshes and of the Georgie Oaks likens the shadowy St. Joe and the equally shadowy but more obscure Cœur meadow land. The tourist sitting on the deck d'Alene river to the Rhine, and bemoans the absence of storied castles, never dreaming of the chain of jeweled lakes that lies just beyond.

It was on the most cleverly hidden of these

lakes that Russell's cabin stood. Years before I had paddled down the river and contrived to find the lead. But the thickets were still deeper now, and I doubted my ability to find the narrow aperture. Toward the middle of the afternoon, therefore, I threw the saddle on Buttons, and rode away beneath the fragrant yews, seeking the trail that skirted the mountain.

The day was fair, the sky a soft azure, and the wheat fields rippled in a sultry breeze; but as I left the trail and descended through a boscage of cedars and scrub pines, following the damp clay path to Hidden Lake, I shivered in spite of the warmth of the day. And when I rode through the rushes that grew as high as a man's head, and emerged on the cozy grey beach, and gazed across the deep blue, unnatural quiet of the water, I was weighted down by a weird depression. I felt suddenly like a puny thing, shaken with the knowledge of my own mutability. A bittern rose up from the tules, flapped its wings and gave its honking note of desolation; a flock of terns on a piece of driftwood emitted raucous cries. Russell's cabin stood before me, weather-beaten, warped, and unsightly; moss on the roof, bricks falling from the chimney, the door steps rotted, the small porch sagging.

I slid off my cayuse and stood contemplating the ravages about me. Not a sound came from the cabin. Presently, I gathered my courage sufficiently to mount the steps and knock with the butt of my whip on the slatternly door that stood ajar. I received no response. I waited. The bittern in the tules gave its pumping call, "pumper-lunk, pumper-lunk," and the hollow rushes droned suddenly in the wind like ghoulish piccolos. I pushed open the door without further ado and looked within.

I saw a small room, dust-covered and cob-web frescoed. The floor was littered with refuse, the fireplace held a bank of gray ashes, the home-made furniture had fallen a prey to the savage onslaughts of wood rats. A damp and disagreeable odor permeated the air. "Surely she has not been here," I said to myself.

I stepped to a door at the further end of the room, turned the wobbly knob, peered within, and shrank back, confounded at what I saw.

The light was streaming in through a window that had been recently washed and polished until it shown, over a floor freshly scoured. A small white-draped dressing table with all a woman's dainty toilet paraphernalia met my prying eyes; a small cot gleamed fresh and spotless in a

corner; and on every chair, and ranged on the floor around the room, were canvases of various sizes with tantalizing impressionistic bits of the outdoor world painted upon them, while streaming from an open trunk and overflowing in sumptuous, foamy sensuousness to the crude pine floor was the lingerie of a fastidious woman.

I took myself out of the house post-haste, threw myself into my saddle, and plunged away into the enveloping shadows of the cedar thicket. That night I climbed up Nigger Head almost to old Lundquist's very door. I cast my eyes down in the direction of Hidden Lake. I saw a small red light gleaming there. I lay down on a ledge of rock and watched the light, watched it until toward midnight it disappeared, the wind came up with a soughing sound, the tall pines creaked and swayed above my head, and I walked down the mountain—the rain in my face.

CHAPTER III

I FELL SOME TREES

ALL night the rain pelted furiously against my window, and the wind blew a hurricane, roaring in the pine trees, maundering in my chimney, and rattling the loose casements. In the morning the rain had ceased. The sky was massed with black clouds, but streaks of blue glimmered here and there, and there was a glorious rainbow.

"Oh, Mr. David," Joey shouted, hanging on my arm as I opened the front door, "the sky looks like a Bible picture!" But I was thinking of Haidee and wondering how she had borne the storm, alone on the shore of that black melancholy lake, through all the devastating night. A huge pine tree lay uprooted across the path, the serviceberry bushes were stripped bare of bloom, and a cottonwood growing on the river bank sprawled, a shattered giant, bathing its silver head in the water.

I evaded Joey, slipped around to the tool-shed,

and taking my ax and crosscut saw, mounted my cayuse and rode stealthily away. When I got within sight of the cabin on Hidden Lake, I looked around me fearfully. Smoke was coming from the chimney, and the cabin seemed unscathed. And then I saw that one of the towering pine trees in the draw adjacent had fallen, and in falling had barely grazed the lean-to. The cabin had miraculously escaped.

I rode around to the rear of the cabin and knocked with my whip on the closed door. A figure rose up suddenly out of the bracken by the spring and came to my horse's head. A figure in a crumpled red cape, with big startled tired eyes, and pale cheeks.

"I have come to cut down every tree that endangers the cabin," I announced grimly.

She looked at me, brushed her disordered hair back from her eyes, attempted to speak, and failing, dropped her head forward against the horse's neck and stood with face hidden.

"I came as soon as I could," I continued, brooding above the wonderful bent head with its heavy ringlets of hair.

A sound unintelligible answered me. I sat there awkwardly, scarcely knowing what was expected of me. Presently she moved, looked up

at me, and smiled. Her purple-black eyes were dewy. Standing there in her jaunty cape and short skirt, with her opulent hair unbound and sweeping her shoulders, she might have been a timid schoolgirl; and suddenly I lost my awe of her, though my admiration deepened.

"Were you alone through all that brute of a storm?"

"Yes."

I got off my horse, and she took the bridle from my hand.

"I shall have to get a woman to stay with me," she said slowly.

"An elderly woman?"

"No! No! A young woman—a strapping country girl with boisterous spirits," she protested, an odd husky catch in her voice.

I revolved this in my mind. "Wanza Lyttle is the very one for you," I declared jubilantly. Then I added uncertainly: "That is, if she will come."

"And who is Wanza Lyttle?"

"Oh, Wanza is a wonderful girl," I answered, warming to my part. "She drives a peddler's cart. I've no doubt she will call on you. There never was such a peddler's cart as Wanza's, I'll give you my word. It has a green umbrella with

a pink lining, and two green wheels with pink spokes, and Wanza's buckskin pony is never without a green paper rosette for his harness—"

"You're not telling me much about Wanza, after all," Haidee interrupted, opening her velvet eyes wide, and favoring me with an odd glance.

"Oh, but I am, I am going on to tell you that Wanza lined the green umbrella herself, and painted her cart. She is very capable. She makes cherry pies that melt in your mouth. And her tatting!—you should see her tatting."

"It's on all her dresses, I suppose?"

"It is. And her dresses are pink and starchy. Yes," I ended, "Wanza is very capable, indeed—" I hesitated. It was awkward not knowing what to call my wonder woman.

"My name is Judith Batterly," she said quietly, seeing my hesitation—"Mrs. Batterly. I am a widow."

A turbulent tide of crimson swept up to her brow as she spoke. Her eyes sought the ground. There was a silence. The sun had forsaken its nest of feathery clouds and all the shy woodland things began to prink and preen. A flycatcher ruffled its olive plumage on an old stump in the spring, a blue jay jargoned stridently. Above our heads tiny butterflies floated—an iridescent,

turquoise cloud. A fragrant steam arose from the damp earth.

As the sound of my trusty ax rang through the woods, and I chopped and sawed with a will all through the morning, I asked myself what it mattered to me whether Haidee were maid, wife or widow. I asked myself this, over and over again, and I did not answer my own question.

By noon I was hot, streaming with perspiration, and covered with chips and sawdust. I was inspecting a symmetrical, soaring white fir-tree that towered some fifty feet distant from the cabin, when a voice behind me cried: "No, no!" so peremptorily, that I started.

I turned to see Haidee standing there. She had looped up the masses of her black hair, and discarded the scarlet cape for a white corduroy jacket. A white duck skirt gave her an immaculate appearance.

"I want that fir left," she explained.

"Your cabin is in jeopardy while it stands," I assured her.

"Oh, I'll take the risk," she said carelessly.

"It is foolish to take a risk," I countered.

She smiled. "Are all woodsmen as cautious as you?"

Now, I am convinced she was only bantering me, but I chose to take offense. I looked at her cool daintiness, and met her level gaze with shifting sullen eyes. I was unpleasantly aware of the figure I presented, with my grimy hands and soiled clothing, and red, streaming face. I reached for my handkerchief, remembered that I had lent it to Joey, and used the back of my hand, instead, to wipe my beaded forehead.

"It is sometimes fortunate for the new-comer that we woodsmen are before-handed," I said pointedly.

At this, a stain of carmine crept into the flawless face. Resentment deepened in her eyes. "Thank you for your morning's work, my man," she said, as if to an inferior. "How much do I owe you?"

A vast slow anger shook me. I saw her through hot eyes. I did not answer. She lifted her shoulders with a forebearing shrug, and tendered me a coin on a palm that was like a pink rose petal. I snatched at the coin. I sent it spinning into the buck brush. And I turned on my heel.

"When you want that tree felled, send for old Lundquist back on Nigger Head. He's the

man you want," I growled, jerking my thumb over my shoulder.

By the time I reached Cedar Dale, I was overcome with chagrin and remorse at my uncouth behavior. The more so, when on dismounting I turned Buttons over to Joey's eager hands; for in the saddle-bag Joey discovered a small flat parcel addressed: "To the boy who goes to Sunday-School." The parcel contained peppermints of a kind Joey had never encountered before, and a gaily striped Windsor tie between the leaves of a book of rhymes.

Each night after that I climbed Nigger Head and lay on my ledge of basaltic rock and watched the light down on Hidden Lake. Each time the wind came up in the night, I turned uneasily on my pillow and thought of Haidee alone in that ramshackle cabin. And I worried not a little over that white fir that towered there, sentinel like, but menacing her safety.

Joey surprised me one day with the information that he had been to Hidden Lake.

"I took Jingles—the collie. Jingles carried the basket," he added.

"What basket?" I asked sharply, looking up from the flute I was making for Joey out of a bit of elder.

"The basket with the strawberries."

I knew of course they were berries from my vines, that were unusually flourishing for that season of the year, but I continued:

"What strawberries, Joey?"

Joey's honest eyes never wavered. He smiled at me, pursed his lips, and attempted a whistle.

"I'm most sure I saw a little brown owl fly out of a hole in the ground last night, Mr. David," he ventured, giving over the whistling after a time. "Do owls burrow in holes—like rabbits?"

"What strawberries, Joey?" I repeated perseveringly.

"Our strawberries—mine and yours. I put green salmon berry leaves in the basket. Jingles carried it so careful! Never spilled a berry."

I stroked the shaggy head at my knee. "He's a good old fuss pup. Aren't you, Jingles?"

"That's what she said, Mr. David. I sat on her porch a whole hour. She asked the most questions." Joey reflected. "People always ask boys questions."

"Do they, Joey?"

"Gracious—goodness! I should say so! She asked me what I was agoing to be when I grow up. I told her—" Joey came over to my knee and stroked the flute in my hand caressingly.

"What did you tell her, boy?"

"I told her," he took his hand away and looked at me slyly, "I told her I was agoing to be a fixing man like you."

CHAPTER IV

WANZA

"WANZA," I asked, "how would you like to earn some money?"

Wanza's big child eyes looked at me from beneath the curls that tumbled distractingly about her fair face.

"Mr. Dale," she said solemnly, "I earn six dollars a week with my cart."

We were sitting on the river bank in the shade of some cottonwoods, having met at the village post-office. We had met at three o'clock, and it was close onto five when I propounded my query. I admitted to myself, when I put the question, that I had been philandering. But there was not a swain in the village of Roselake who did not philander with Wanza. And Wanza, gay, quick-tempered, happy-hearted Wanza—who knew if she were as guileless as she seemed with her frank camaraderie?

"To be sure you do," I answered her, lying back on the soft green turf and lazily watching the skimming clouds high above the terre verte

steeples of the pines, "to be sure you do. But how would you like to earn thirty dollars a month—and still drive your cart?"

"Mr. Dale," Wanza returned, solemnly as before, "it can't be done."

Her eyes had grown bigger and brighter, and she rocked forward, clasping her hands over her knees. I did not reply to this assertion, and after a pause she spoke one word, still hugging her knees and keeping her corn-flower blue eyes fixed steadily on the river. "How?"

"Wanza," I asked, "did you know Russell's old ranch on Hidden Lake had been sold?"

She shook her head.

"A lady has bought it. And this lady wants a companion—some one young and lively. I think she would pay you well for being—er—lively. And I am almost sure she would not object to the peddler's cart, if you would give up your evenings to her—"

Wanza spoke abruptly. "No! Oh, no! No, indeed!" she declared.

I was puzzled. "Why," I said, "I thought the plan a capital one."

"But it isn't. Just think of it, Mr. Dale. Daddy at home alone every evening, and me—all smugged up, asetting there on one side of the

kitchen table—her on the other—me asewing, and her aknitting and asleeping in her chair. Oh, I think I have a large sized picture of myself doing it."

"Wanza," I began tactfully, "how old do you think the lady is?"

Wanza's lips drew down, and she shook her head.

"She is not old," I ventured.

"But I hate rich ladies when they're middle-aged, Mr. Dale. A rich woman, middle-aged, is as bad as a poor one when she's terrible, squeezy old. The rich one'll want tea and toast in bed, and a fire in her bedroom."

"Well," I said, "I can't vouch for the lady's personal habits, but I'm quite certain she won't nod over her knitting, and I shouldn't call her middle-aged, Wanza."

Wanza looked suddenly suspicious. "Is she the lady as came to your workshop, Mr. Dale?"

"Yes, Wanza."

"How old would you say she was?"

"Not over twenty-six."

"Twenty-six." A suspicious glint darkened Wanza's blue eyes. "Pretty?"

"Yes."

The eyes glowered.

"Thirty a month would be a help, now, Wanza, wouldn't it?" I wheedled.

Wanza threw out both arms, dropped back on the grass and lay with closed eyes. Presently she murmured faintly: "Did you say thirty a month?"

"I said thirty a month," I repeated firmly.

One eye opened. Wanza kicked a pine cone into the river, opened the other eye, and stared at the tips of her copper-toed shoes fixedly.

"Thirty a month added to twenty-four—Mm! I could go to school next year, Mr. Dale."

"You could."

"I could learn how to talk."

"How to talk correctly," I amended.

"That's what I meant. Well, it all depends."

"On what, Wanza?"

"On her. If she's a certain kind, I can't go—if she isn't, I can."

"It sounds simple," I decided.

We were silent for a time. I lay back with half closed eyes, watching a king bird that had a nest in a cottonwood tree on the bank hard by. Presently Wanza spoke lazily:

"There's a lot of those Dotted Blue butterflies hovering about, Mr. Dale—the gay little busy things—they look like flowers with wings."

I unclosed my eyes and looked at the azure cloud before us.

"Those are the Acmon, girl. See the orange-red band on the hind wings. Look closely. The Dotted Blue have a dusky purplish band."

"Of course. I don't seem to learn very fast. But I'm getting to know the birds, and I do know heaps about the wild flowers. I never saw such big daisies as I saw to-day in the meadow back of our house—I don't suppose you call them daisies—and a yellow throat has a nest among 'em. Yes! Oh, the meadow looks like a snow field! I been watching the daisies—they close up at night, tight."

"And they open with the dawn. Daisies are not very common in the west. I must have a look at your snow field."

Wanza's luxuriant hair of richest maize color was spread out in sheeny wealth over the pillow of pine needles on which her head rested. I reached out negligently and separated a long curl from its fellows. "How silky and fine it is," I commented. Wanza lay motionless. "It would be wonderful—washed," I murmured, half to myself.

Wanza kicked another pine cone into the river.

"Plenty of soap and a thorough rinsing," I continued musingly.

"Let it alone," Wanza commanded crossly, her light brows coming together over stormy eyes.

"I can't," I said teasingly. "My fingers are rough, and it clings."

Wanza sat up quickly, cried "Ouch!" and the next instant I received a stinging slap on the cheek. I caught her by the elbows, got to my feet, and pulled her up beside me.

"I think I won't recommend you to the lady who has bought Russell's old ranch, after all," I taunted. "She wouldn't want a virago."

She gave a smothered sound and put her head down suddenly into the crook of her arm, and I felt that she was weeping. I looked down at the sunny hair straying in beautiful disarray over the rough sleeve of my flannel shirt, and I experienced a pang of self-reproach. I had wounded her pride. I had offended grievously. Repentantly I attempted to lift the burrowing chin.

"I was only teasing, silly," I was beginning.

Wanza's head came up with an abrupt jerk, and—she bit me—a nasty, sharp little nip on my ingratiating finger.

CHAPTER V

THE LEAD

I SEEMED to have cut myself off quite effectually from communication with either Haidee or Wanza. The days went by, colorless and unlovely. And June came at last, bringing new wonderful wild flowers, and added tassels to the tamaracks, and browner stalks to the elder bushes.

One unusually hot afternoon I sat in my canoe, idly drifting on the shadowy river, marvelling at the clear cut reflections, and casting an eye about for a certain elusive break in the screen of willow shoots and rushes. If I once paddled my craft successfully through this meagre opening, I knew I should find a narrow waterway that would convey me to the shore of Hidden Lake.

What I should do when I reached that shore was a matter of conjecture. But after paddling along close to the high grass and floundering about in the tules for an hour, I gave over my

search, rested on my paddle, and fell into deep thought. And my thoughts were not pleasant ones. Like the man in the story, I realized that at a certain hour of a certain day I had been a fool.

A slight sound disturbed my reverie. I looked ahead. A canoe came slipping along in the shade of the willows. As I stared and stared, a voice hailed me, a voice compelling and shrill. Wanza sat, paddle in hand, the thick fair hair pleached low on her brows and bound with a crimson handkerchief, her young eyes disdainful, her lips sulky. When she met my eyes she frowned.

I swept my canoe close to hers. "Did you call me?" I asked, with marked respect.

She frowned still more deeply.

"Wanza," I cried, with swift cajolery, "washed or unwashed your hair is wonderful. It is the color of corn silk, and your eyes are surely blue as the corn-flowers. Will you forgive my rudeness when last we met?"

She smiled ever so slightly and the heaviness left her face.

"How is business?" I asked.

"I've sold one whisk broom, five spools of darning cotton, a pair of cotton socks, and three

strings of blue glass beads, to-day," she said succinctly.

"Glass beads are the mode, then? It is shocking how out of touch I am with the world of fashion beyond Cedar Dale." I smiled across at the flushed face. "Now who among the rancher's wives, I wonder, could have had the temerity to pay the price of three strings of blue glass beads."

Wanza drew her paddle from the water, giving her head a backward toss. "And it isn't to ranchers' wives or town folks I've been selling the beads. It's to the gipsies at the gipsy encampment beyond the village." Of a sudden her face crumpled with an expression of sly reflection. "A gipsy woman told my fortune too, Mr. Dale; oh, a great fortune she told me!"

"What did she tell you, child?" I asked, anxious to appear friendly and interested. "It must have been something exceptionally good, since you are so vastly pleased."

Her light brows came together. She shook her head until her hair spun out riotously like fine zigzag flames about her damask cheeks. "It was not a bit good. It was as bad as bad could be. Hm! It made me shiver, Mr. Dale. She said she saw," Wanza lowered her voice and

glanced apprehensively over her shoulder at the tree shadows, "she said she saw blood on my hands."

In spite of myself I felt myself grow cold, sitting there with the warm sun on my back. And I cried out angrily: "Have you no better sense than to listen to a pack of foolish lies from the tongue of a vagabond gipsy? I am surprised at you, Wanza. Surprised—yes, and ashamed of you!"

I dipped my paddle into the water and swung my canoe about.

"Wait," I heard a surprisingly meek voice entreat. "I thought you was going to get me a place with the lady as has bought Russell's old place. Have you forgotten, Mr. Dale?"

I rested on my paddle. "Oh, no," I said, airily, "I have not forgotten!"

"I believe you've been hunting for the opening in the willows and haven't been able to find it, either! And here was I hoping you could help me! I been looking for it for an hour. I was going to see this woman at Hidden Lake, myself. After a while when I get to a slack time with my peddling I may take the place with her."

There was a brief silence. I felt her searching eyes on my face.

"To be sure," I said then, "I can find the tricksy aperture that leads to the narrow water route that runs between this river and Hidden Lake—"

Wanza interrupted me with an impish laugh.

"It sounds like that nursery rhyme you say to Joey."

"Yes," I went on with the air of weighing the matter, "I can find the opening very easily, I dare say, when I come to look for it."

Her eyes grew grave. She favored me with a ruminative glance. Presently she said:

"Well, go ahead—find the tricksy aperture! I'm waiting."

I propelled my canoe forward. "I shall find the open sesame," I boasted.

The gravity left her eyes; they grew starry with mirth. She repeated gayly:

"Go ahead!"

After all it was through sheer good luck that I found the entrance to the slight channel that led to the lake. Wanza gave me a surprised glance as I held aside the willow shoots lest the branches rake her head, as her canoe slipped through the leafy opening in the wall of high growing greenery. My blood flowed smoothly and deliciously through my veins as I answered

her glance and swept my canoe along close to hers, letting the willows swing into place behind us.

Oh, the secretive charm of the weaving, ribbon-like waterway, as it glided in and out between the high willow-fringed banks of the meadows! Oh, the flowered border-ways past which the curling stream ran turbidly, oily and dark and shadow-flecked, beneath the shivering grey-green tree arcade. Oh, the perfume of the syringa, the pipe of mating birds, the bee droning that made the air sensuous with sound. We were borne along silkenly. We scarcely spoke. We drifted thus for a time, and then the channel, gradually widening, conveyed us through leafy growths and over-arching green to the lake, snug in its frame of cedars.

Ten minutes later I stood on the crumbling steps of the old cabin and looked up at Wanza, where she stood, leaning against the door frame, a waving curtain of woodbine casting delicate shadows on her face. Glancing down and meeting my eyes she smiled.

"Shall I knock?" she whispered.

I nodded.

But her knock elicited no response.

"I reckon she's gone off into the woods sketch-

ing. Old Lundquist says she sketches a lot, and rides, and shoots at marks."

My heart sank. I sat down on the top step. Wanza seated herself on the piazza railing. "Quiet here, isn't it?" she said musingly. "I think I'd like living here. It's wild and free. Why, the village just seems to cramp me some times! What's that funny bird making that screeching noise, Mr. Dale? And where is he?"

"In the pine tree yonder. High up on one of the topmost branches. That's our western wood pewee, Wanza. Listen and you will hear the true pewee note. He gives it occasionally. But his customary note is a very strident unlovely one, almost like the cry a hawk makes—there! He is giving his pewee call, now."

We sat very still, listening. "Pewee, Pewee," the bird gave its sad, plaintive cry, repeatedly.

Presently I said: "So even as unconventional a place as Roselake village makes you restless, does it, Wanza?"

"I should say so. It's the people—and—and church!"

"Church!"

She met my eyes somberly. "Going to church almost kills me. It does, honest. Hats do, too."

"Hats!"

"Thinking about 'em. Seeing 'em on other people—in front of you—at church—knowing they can't afford 'em—but wishing you'd skimped Dad a little more on his white sugar and got a better one."

I laughed outright. Her eyes continued to meet mine broodingly.

"Why don't we have church out doors, Mr. Dale? And why don't we just kneel down in our work clothes, bare headed? I'd like to know! The trouble with church is that we only have it once a week and in the house. If we had it in the words or fields and we didn't go dressed up—oh, a body'd feel so much nearer to heaven!"

"The woods were God's first temples," I said gently.

"I'd like to go to church in the woods, and to school in the woods. When I am sick—even sick-hearted—the out of doors seems to cure me, Mr. Dale."

"Nature is sanative," I agreed.

Her eyes fired. "I love every tree and every

shrub, and every rose and every trillium—yes, even the weeds—yarrow ain't so bad! It's got a fine nutty flavor, hasn't it now? I love the scarred old mountains, and I love the dew on fine mornings, and the sky on stormy nights."

"Heaven's terrible bonfires, and the delicate rainbow belt—the purple of the new day," I murmured dreamily.

Wanza drew her feet up beneath her gown, and clasped her knees with her hands. Looking across them she put a wistful question: "Does it seem long to you since you were a little boy, Mr. Dale?"

"Rather long," I answered drearily.

"I feel still as if I was a little girl. Funny, ain't it? I like such wee things—flowers and birds, and kittens and puppies."

"You seem very childlike, Wanza—your mind is like that of a child—I mean—you think like a child." Here I broke off, catching an indignant flash in her eye.

"How do you know I think like a child? I may act like one. And a very bad one, too, some times! I don't deny that. But my thoughts—well, they are my own! I'd be willing some times to have them child-thoughts." She sighed ponderously. "Hm! I have some pretty

grown-up thoughts—and worries, times, when I'm all alone."

"I intended to say, Wanza girl, that you have a young soul—students of Oriental literature tell us that some souls are younger than others."

She looked at me, frowned, bit her lip and then said dryly: "Do they know more about it than we do?"

"I think so, child."

"Oh, all right—I don't care! So long as I know I've got a soul it's enough for me."

"There are people—do you know it, little girl?—who doubt the existence of the soul."

"What?"

Wanza turned on me so quickly that she almost lost her balance on the piazza railing. I repeated my remark.

"They don't believe—they don't belie—why, David Dale, how dare you sit there and tell me such stuff as that!"

"I am speaking the truth, girl."

"Did you ever know any one who thought that way? Tell me that?"

"Yes—one or two."

"Where?"

"At college."

"At college!" Wanza gave a quick twitter of

mirth. "Well, if they was such fools as that, why did they waste their time trying to learn anything."

I shook my head. "I cannot answer that, Wanza."

"Why! Couldn't they smell the flowers, and see the birds—and hear 'em, and look up at the stars at night?"

I shook my head again. "One would think so, child."

"Perhaps they never looked down at the flowers, or up at the birds, or higher up at the stars."

"Perhaps not."

"Law!" Disgust was painted on her speaking face. "I knew there was all kinds of people in the world!—siwashs, and cannibals, and heathen as never had a chance—but I never knew before that there was educated white men who didn't believe folks has got souls." She uncramped her knees, let her feet down until they touched the floor, and rose to her full height, stretching her arms high over her head. Standing thus, she raised her face and closed her eyes, I saw her lips move.

Still maintaining her position she whispered presently:

"Even with my eyes shut—not being able to see anything—I can *feel* God!"

And this was Wanza—simple, ignorant Wanza! whom I aspired to teach.

We sat on the steps, side by side till sundown, waiting for the mistress of the cabin to appear. But she did not come. And in the twilight Wanza and I paddled back through the narrow lead, and parted where it joins the river. Her song floated back to me as I swept along in my canoe,—an old, old song I had often heard my father sing:

"Wait for me at heaven's gate—Sweet Bell Mahone."

In the east I saw the thin curve of the new moon; the departing sun had left the west purple and gold, the water was streaked with color. I heard the whistle of the thrush, and the weird, "Kildee-Kildee" of the Kildeer from the marshy shore of the lake. The hour was rich with charm. Old Indian legends leaped to my mind as the fascinating "Kildee-Kildee" note continued. I thought of myself as a little chap listening to Leather Stocking bed-time tales told to me by my father, while I lay watching with charmed eyes the shadow of the acacia tree on the opposite wall. Memories stirred. My

throat tightened. Before I could grip my thoughts and turn them aside to safer channels, tears rolled down my cheeks. "Dad, Dad," I whispered, over and over, as if he might hear me, "anything for you—anything!"

CHAPTER VI

CAPTAIN GRIF

WANZA'S father had always been an interesting personality to me. He was a portly, ponderous-speaking man, with a rubicund visage, a twinkling eye, and a jovial smile. There was a humourous twist to each sentence he turned, and this in connection with an undeniable stutter made conversation with him an unending source of joy.

He had been a sea captain in his youth. He could spin me yarns by the hour. And many a snug winter evening I had spent in the little room under the eaves of his comfortable cottage, listening to tales of the high seas, and songs of the rolling main. His room with its slanting ceiling, its built-in bunks, its nautical equipment of compass and sextant, charts and logbook and maps, smacked pleasantly of the sea; and when the wind roared in the chimney and the snow and sleet twanged on the window panes, I used to shut my eyes and fancy myself aboard the

good ship *Wanderer* bound for the North Seas.

There was always a glass on the table, and a bottle of home-made root beer was always forthcoming, and though I was not over fond of this drink a glass of it had a grateful tang, when I drank with Old Grif Lyttle, the captain of the bonny brig *Wanderer,* in the small cubby hole he called his cabin.

The captain invariably wore a blue jacket with brass buttons. His nether garments might be what one would call shabby and uncouth, but the jacket was always neatly brushed, the buttons burnished. Wanza was like the Hebe in Pinafore—she kept his buttons bright. And had he owned a sword to polish I am well satisfied it would have been immaculate. Wanza's pride in her father was unbounded. It was equaled only by his pride in her.

"The smartest gal—and the prettiest," he would say, "you'll f-find in the whole state. Jest like her dead mother, Mr. Dale, jest like her. Smart as a s-sand piper. Named herself—she did. Did I ever tell you about that now?" Here he would pause and look at me sharply. And though the tale was a familiar one to me I would always affect deep interest and bid him proceed. "It was this a-way," he would con-

tinue, "when her mother was my sweetheart, being of a fanciful turn, and with a decided hankerin' after me,—as was to be expected, when I was gone for months on the sea and every thing uncertain like,—she called me her wanderer. I was her wanderer, and her wandering boy, and finally her wandering husband. So when I got my ship at last it was natural—although I was in favor of naming the craft after her—for us to decide that the name should be *The Wanderer.* In due time Wanza was born. Well, it had been easy enough naming the ship, but there warnt no name good enough for the babe! 'Let her alone,' I used to say, 'she's a s-smart child, she'll name herself.' And sure enough when she was old enough to prattle she began calling herself Wanzer, from hearing her mother and me speak of the craft, sir. I reckon sometimes hearing us call it endearin' titles she thought we was referrin' to her babyship. At least my wife she allowed as much. Howsoever, from Wanzer she got it changed to Wanza, and my wife allowed that Wanza was a genteel enough name, so we stuck by it."

The small, four-roomed cottage where Wanza and her father lived was at the edge of the village. It stood on a slight rise of ground, overlooking

the lake. From the narrow front porch one could look abroad and see fertile fields, stretches of smooth, glossy meadow land, and the craggy grey-blue mountains in the distance. In summer Grif Lyttle could be found customarily on his porch. And it was here I discovered him, when in my new restlessness I thought of him and wondering how he fared, sought him out.

He made me welcome. His ruddy face broke into smiles at the sight of me, and he rose from his rocker, and shoved me, with a playful poke in the ribs, into the seat he had vacated, saying:

"By golly, ship-mate, I thought you'd passed me up for good and all."

He sat down in a red-cushioned Boston rocker opposite me. A small table stood between us, and as he spoke he gave me a sly wink, and whisked off a white cloth that covered a tray that reposed there. A bottle and two glasses stood revealed, a plate of pretzels, and one of cheese cakes.

"My lunch," he explained. "That is to say—our lunch, boy."

"But you thought I had passed you by. The extra glass is not for the likes of me. Come now—whom do I rob?"

"It's Father O'Shan from the Mission.

Here's to him! He's an hour late, and the man who is an hour late had better not come at all."

"Not if he comes for cakes and ale," I assented, biting into a cheese cake with relish.

"No—nor if he comes for nothing. Punctuality is my hobby. Yes, it be, s-ship-mate. There's twice the spice to an adventure if it's pulled off when it should be. Cool your heels fifteen minutes, or a half hour, waiting for the party of the second part, and you don't give a—ahem!—what becomes of the expedition. Yes, sir! the keen whet has gone if you have to wait over long for the other fellow. That chap is a borrowin'—no! he's stealin' your time. And I don't borrow—and I don't like to lend—and you can't respect a thief. So there you are!" He looked at me, grinned mendaciously, and continued: "The other fellow gets the cream of the whole adventure. He's probably takin' a drink with some other old crony while you're waitin'."

"But that doesn't apply in this case," I reminded him, calmly helping myself to another of Wanza's delicious cheese cakes.

"Not in this case. No, sir! Father O'Shan's probably been held up by some one with a long-winded yarn of how the poor wife's adyin' of consumption, and the kids of starvation. The

Father's heart's that s-soft he'd s-strip the coat from his back to give it to a beggar."

"Yes," I said, "I well know that. Wanza has told me as much."

"Wanza knows she hasn't any better friends than Father O'Shan and the sisters at the old Mission up De Smet way." The smiling face lengthened, he filled his pipe from the tobacco jar at his elbow, and tamped down the weed with a broad forefinger. "Wanza's a high strung girl, Mr. Dale, she's peppery, and she's headstrong, but Sister Veronica can do almost anything with her, ay! since the time when I brought her out to the river country with me, a poor, sick, wee, motherless lass, pretty nigh sixteen years ago. She's larned all she knows of the sisters about cooking and sewing and the like."

"And we know that is considerable," I said.

"She's quite some cook, I make no doubt. There ain't much Wanza don't know about a house."

"How do you manage during Wanza's busy season when she is absent so much in her cart? She seems to be a very busy saleswoman these days," I remarked.

"Well, the days are lonesome like. But she's hardly ever gone more'n a night or two at a time

—the gal never neglects her old dad. Once a week she tidies and bakes regular. I am used to bachin' it too, it seems natural to cook vittles, and sweep—jest like old times. I allow it's great. The most bothersome thing I have to do now-a-days is 'tendin' the flowers. Wanza's got such a posy garden it sure gets to be a nuisance some days when my joints be stiffer than common."

He chuckled and waved in the direction of the garden plot at the side of the house. "Not but what I take a pride in it myself," he added as he caught my interested and not wholly unappreciative glance.

To glance at Wanza's garden was to receive a dizzying impression of pink and white bloom, pranked round by shining smooth rocks of uniform size and whiteness. The flash and dazzle of it struck blindingly on the eyes. It was Wanza-like. I got up, descended the porch steps, and went to the garden, the better to inspect its glamour and richness. Rows of pink holly-hocks, clusters of sweet William, trellises of sweet peas, fluffy red peonies, pink and white poppies bordering beds of tea roses breathed of Wanza. And yet—the wild things at Cedar Dale pleased her best, I knew.

Captain Lyttle seemed to be reading my thoughts, for he said facetiously:

"It's a fairly purty garden, to my notion, but there ain't anything in it as good as the swamp laurel and lupine at Cedar Dale, accordin' to Wanza. She don't hold by cultivated flowers no more, she says. Give her the wood-flowers as grows wild and hides away, she says. And that reminds me, Mr. Dale, I got that bird you give her at Christmas on my hands, too. 'Poor old Dad,' she says, 'will have him for company. He's mine,' she says, 'he's mine. But, Dad, what's mine is yours.' Meanin' I'm to take care 'o him." He put his hand on my shoulder. "Come along in to Wanza's room and have a look at him."

I was getting new side lights on Wanza's character to-day. Even her room was an elucidation. It was small, with a long narrow window on the south side and a door that opened into the garden. The walls were bright with gay sprigged paper, the bed was white as a snow heap, the curtain at the window was spotless and looped with pink ribbon. Wood-work and floor were painted green, also the wooden bed and small dresser. There was a green tissue paper shade on the lamp on the table; and green paper rosettes were

wreathed around cheap prints and fastened with gilt headed tacks to the walls. But in spite of its tawdriness the room had a fragrance of lavender, a nicety that was comforting. It was a little girl's room. Indeed, I spied a fat-faced wax doll in one corner seated on a balloon-like pink silk cushion; and on a shelf with an impossible beaded lambrequin stood a Dresden-china lamb and a wax cupid in a glass case.

The canary's cage hung in the window, clouded in folds of pink mosquito bar. But the canary itself was on the limb of a flowering currant bush outside the window. I chirruped to it, but it contented itself with chirruping back, and I left it unmolested. As I looked around the room again my eye was arrested by a snap-shot picture of Joey and myself framed in bark and covered with the inevitable pink mosquito netting, standing on a small table at the head of Wanza's bed. Above it on the wall hung a Christmas card I had given Wanza, bearing Tiny Tim's message "God bless us every one."

Grif Lyttle evinced considerable pride as he showed me the room. His genial face beamed, and his eyes shone as he looked about him from the green rosettes to the beaded lambrequin and back to me.

"Snug little nest, eh?" he hazarded. Meeting my appraising eye his face twisted into an odd look of whimsical interrogation. "Some girl—what? Know any finer—ever see a prettier?"

"No," I answered.

"Nowhere?"

"No."

"Ever eat after a better cook?"

"Certainly I never have."

"Ever expect to?"

"No."

He gave his booming laugh, and led the way to the porch.

"Right-o, ship-mate! Have another glass now, and we'll drink to the gal's health, and finish the cheese cakes."

Passing along the main street of the village some two hours later, I saw Father O'Shan, climbing out of a ramshackle gig at the door of the post-office. I went up to him and placed my hand on his shoulder, saying:

"Good afternoon, Father O'Shan, I want to confess."

His fine, ascetic face turned round to me with a wave of quick sympathy overspreading it; then when he saw who it was who had accosted him

he laughed, a musical, clear-timbred peal, good to hear.

"I have eaten your cheese cakes," I vouchsafed.

He wrung my hand. "Good! Captain Grif doesn't have much sympathy with the delinquent. I fancy his comments were characteristic." A shadow fell athwart his face. "I was called to the bedside of a sick man—a dying man—a homesteader. He is dying in poverty and distress—alone—but for me, yonder in the mountains."

My mood veered suddenly. "I know the man—if I can help,—" I began, and stumbled on; "In like straits I may find myself, some day."

I felt my shoulder pressed. "No, David Dale. Not you! Will you walk with me a way?" he asked abruptly.

I turned with him and we left the dusty street, and took the road that bordered the river. Already the sun was slipping behind the western mountains, and the water ran rainbow-colored, between its high, shelving banks. Father O'Shan took off his hat and bared his head to the breeze that was springing up.

"A day for gods to stoop—ay, and men to soar," he quoted, favoring me with his warm smile. "I've had a hard day, Dale, a hard day."

I think I have never seen so rare a face as his. Rugged and yet womanly sensitive and fine. He was a man ten years my senior, I dare say, and in his glance there was something gripping and compelling, something at once stern and gentle, whimsical and austere.

"A hard day—but you've been equal to it, Father O'Shan," I cried impulsively. "When the day comes that I am broken in health, and old and friendless, I shall ask for no other physician, no truer companion, no more sympathetic assuager of pain than you."

I grinned sheepishly as I spoke, but my companion answered earnestly:

"You speak as if you expected always to remain in your small corner, Dale. If I could prophesy I would say two years hence will not find you here."

I shook my head, and we walked on in silence for awhile.

"You may marry," he was beginning, but at the black cloud apparent on my face he caught himself up, saying: "I can't believe you have no future ahead of you, man." He went on, gravely: "Dale, I want to be assured that you look upon me as a friend. We know each other

rather well, and I think we find each other congenial. We have had some rather interesting arguments during our jovial evenings with Captain Grif. At first I thought you were a genius. But I know you better now. I have studied you. You're normal, splendidly balanced, healthy, resistant. You're clever and plodding—you'll make good. But you are not a genius. I like you immensely. Certain things I have gathered from Wanza make me feel that at times you need a friendly hand—that you are breasting treacherous currents, even now. Come, Dale, I'd be your friend."

He held out his hand, mine went out to meet it and we struck palms warmly. I said then:

"I have not been a black sheep. It's a shadow on my past that keeps me here, of course. But the story is not my own—it must be kept inviolate. But my present troubles and ambitions are for your ear—if you will have them. There's my sordid, pinching poverty—you know of that —and—I am writing a book—"

He caught his lip between his teeth; his eyes flashed at me; he appraised me.

"What sort of book?"

"A novel. A story with a strong nature

atmosphere. Someway I feel it will be a success."

"Good! Success to you. Success to you—and Wanza."

"Wanza!" I cried, starting uncontrollably. "What has she to do with it? Wanza—that child?" I finished smilingly.

"A child, is she?" He came to a halt in front of me. "David Dale, be careful in your dealings with that child. Forgive me—I asked you to bear me company that I might say this to you. Be careful."

"But I do not understand," I parried.

He said nothing more, meeting my eyes gravely and extending his hand. And so we parted. And I went home and smiled to myself over his last words as I reviewed them. No one so well as I knew what an incorrigible child Wanza was. I thought of the wax doll on the pink silk cushion and was convinced.

Father O'Shan was the first person to whom I had confided my ambition concerning the novel I was engaged on. I had labored at it many months. It was progressing satisfactorily to me. By autumn I hoped to complete it. I had a fond hope that Christmas would find it sold to the publishing firm in the East to whom I proposed

to send it. If it sold—if it sold!—my plan was to support myself and Joey by the sale of my cedar chests and wood carvings until I could make good in the world of literature.

CHAPTER VII

WANZA BAKES A CAKE

ONE sunny afternoon in the following week I again took my canoe and slipped down the river to the small aperture in the willows. This time I did not hesitate, but entered the lead boldly. And I was no sooner afloat upon the green-fringed waterway than my temerity was rewarded. A canoe appeared around a bend ahead of me, and in the craft sat Haidee plying the paddle. She was almost a dazzling vision as she approached me. She was in white, and the shadows were green all about her, and the ribband snood on her head was blue, and blue flowers were heaped around her feet. When she saw me she called out: "Have you forgotten that you were to send me Wanza Lyttle?" and there was an amused light in her brilliant eyes.

In my confusion I stammered and was unable to make a coherent reply, and after a quick glance at my face, she exclaimed:

"Never mind! I have seen her for myself."

"You have seen her?"

"Yes. I rode into Roselake village this morning and enquired right and left for Miss Lyttle. Every one smiled and said: 'Who? Wanza?' Then I met her in her cart on the river road. I knew her by the green umbrella." Haidee paused and ruminated, wrinkling her brows. "I know why she lined her umbrella with pink."

"Well," I cried, disregarding the seeming irrelevance, "is she coming to stay with you? That's the main thing."

"She's asked for a week or so in which to consider. But—yes, I think she's coming to stay with me."

I breathed a sigh of relief. "Then that's settled."

She went on evenly: "Now that you have found the waterway I hope, very often, after I have secured the services of that distracting girl of the green umbrella—when I am lonely—and you are lonely too—you will take your canoe and seek us out. Not," she amended quickly, "that I mind my solitude. All my life I have hungered for the quiet places. But I must confess I have an eerie feeling—at times—on moonless nights—and sometimes just at twilight—and al-

ways when a coyote howls in the night." Her bright face clouded, then she shrugged. "Never mind! We all have our haunted hours. In the daytime I am gloriously happy and carefree. I take my mare and follow any casual, wee road I can find. I sketch in the woods, and along the river. I tramp too, and climb the hills. But Sonia, my mare, and I are good company. I have hired that funny bent man who lives back on the mountain to take care of my mare for me."

"Lundquist?" I asked, quickly.

"Yes. He has been very neighborly," she replied, with a slight emphasis on the pronoun. She smiled, meeting my eyes, and I said quickly: "I shall be only too happy to call on you and Wanza. I can understand how one not accustomed to solitude would find the environs of Hidden Lake depressing."

Her face grew thoughtful. "I have been wondering lately what attracted me so strongly to the place. It is a drab, unlikely spot, I know. The lake is like a black tarn at night, the dense growth of cedars and pines is repellant, at times. In the moonlight the trees stand up so threatening and ghostly. And when the wind blows they wave gaunt, bearded arms abroad as if warning the too venturesome wayfarer against intruding

here. I have roughhewn my life, Mr. Dale, but I must believe some force beyond me is shaping it. I have been fascinated against my better judgment by Hidden Lake! I had to pitch my tent here, for a time! I had no choice."

It seemed a strange confession. All at once a question leaped to my lips, and I spoke hurriedly:

"I wish you would tell me something of yourself—where your home is—your real home!"

"My real home?"

"I can picture you with surroundings better suited to you. Even I say to myself, 'God grant that this be not my house and my homestead, but decree it to be only the inn of my pain.' "

The quick carmine stained her cheeks. She lifted the blue flowers and held them, plucking nervously at the petals. Then she looked up at me, and uttered something like a little cry of scorn. "Why, it's a painter's paradise—in spite of the loneliness that abounds! Can't you see that?"

"I can see that, of course," I answered.

"And I am an artist. So you are answered. Years ago, with my father, who had mining interests in this section, I spent one whole summer on the Swiftwater, painting. Since then I have

hungered to get back to this adorable river country. I have always wanted a painting retreat in this marvelous lake-jeweled meadow-land, where the mountains shift and merge their colors, and the rivers have such cameo-like reflections. No matter where I may wander," she went on with enthusiasm, "I shall always be glad of this place of inspiration to work in and dream in—I don't look upon it as a permanent habitation, simply as a delightful camp in the wilderness I love."

Paddling home I recalled Haidee's enthusiasm with a smile. And then I bethought me that she had not after all told me the slightest thing concerning herself or any recent home.

Some two hours later as I bent over the stove in the kitchen, intent on frying some thick slices of cornmeal mush for Joey's supper, I heard the whir and grind of wheels and the creaking of harness through the open window. I glanced out. A buckskin pony and two-wheeled cart were skirting the ploughed field and approaching the cabin. I glimpsed a familiar figure beneath the pink glow of the lining of the green umbrella. When the buckskin pony was near enough for me to see the green paper rosettes on its harness, I called out to Joey, who was laying the table in the front room:

"Put on another plate, lad. Wanza is coming."

Something was amiss with Joey. His face had displayed unmistakable signs of perturbation during the day, and there was something infinitely pathetic about the droop of his brown head, usually held so gallantly. I had thought best to disregard his melancholy attitude, knowing that bed-time would bring an unburdening of his heart. In response to my announcement, he gave a fairly frenzied shriek of joy.

"Good—ee!" he shouted, with such a clatter of hob nails as he crossed to the cupboard that I could picture in my mind the jig steps that carried him thither. "There's a wee bit of molasses in the jug," he called to me, "I was saving it for taffy—you said I might. I'll just put it on. And the spring is 'most full of cress, Mr. David, —I'll scoot out and get a panful before she gets here."

He was off like a flash through the kitchen to the spring as Wanza entered by the front door.

I went to meet her. I found her standing in the centre of the living room. The door was open behind her, and her hair was like a pale silver flame in the light. As I drew near to her I saw that her cheeks were splashed with crimson,

her eyes dark with some tempestuous stress of feeling. There was something unfriendly in her bearing. But I held out my hand and cried blithely:

"You are just in time to have a bite of supper with us, Wanza. We heard the rattle of your cart, and Joey has gone to the spring for cress."

She met my glance dourly. Her brows came together and she ignored my outstretched hand.

"Mr. David Dale," she said with great dignity, "perhaps I am wrong, but it's my opinion you've forgotten what day it is."

I smiled into the sullen face. "Oh, no," I said airily, "I have not forgotten! To-day is wash day—therefore Monday."

"Yes, and whose birthday is it, Mr. Dale?"

I stared at her.

"Whose birthday, whose? Just his—his—as never had a birthday that's known of! Except that you vowed he should keep a day for his own every year, and named a day for him, which I thought you meant to keep sacred as Christmas, 'most."

A light dawned on me. Some years before Wanza and I had decided that Joey must keep one day each year as his birthday; and I had dedicated the fifth of June to my little lad; plan-

ning to keep each fifth of June as if it were indeed the anniversary of his birth, as it was the anniversary of his coming to me. A week since I had bethought me of this, yes, even yesterday I had remembered it. But to-day I had visited a charmed spot, I had seen a radiant being, I had listened to a seraphic voice—I had forgotten. I hung my head.

Wanza spoke again. "The poor boy," she said, "poor Joey!" There was a break in her accusing tones. "I didn't think that you'd be the one to forget him, Mr. Dale."

"I'm ashamed of it, Wanza," I confessed. My heart turned heavy within me. I felt a traitor to my trusting lad who would never in his most opulent moment have forgotten me. "I am heartily ashamed of it," I repeated.

After an uncomfortable pause I ventured to raise my eyes from the floor. I saw then that Wanza's arms were filled with mysterious weighty looking bundles. As I would have taken them from her she shook her head, then nodded in the direction of the kitchen.

"You've got a good fire going, I see. Let's get busy! Split up some good dry wood. I want a hot oven in ten minutes. I've brought raisins and spices and brown sugar—I'll stir up

a birthday cake. And as for you—" she paused in her progress kitchenward to favor me with an ominous frown—"as for you, Mr. David Dale, don't let that boy know you went and forgot his birthday or—or I'll never speak to you again."

She passed on to the kitchen and I seized the ax and betook myself to the chopping block. I had just laid my hand on a piece of resinous wood when I heard a joyous confused babble of tongues in the kitchen I had quitted. Joey had entered by the front door and shouted Wanza's name gleefully. And then I heard:

"Bless your old heart! Have you a birthday kiss for Wanza? Well I am late getting round this birthday—I usually come at noon, don't I, Joey?—but better late than never! It's getting too hot to eat in the middle of the day. We thought—Mr. Dale and me—that we would change the doings this year. We didn't want you to imagine, Master Joey, that we couldn't think up anything new for your celebration. We 'lowed as how you were getting a big boy now, and would like more grown up doings."

Joey responded chivalrously:

"You're terrible good to me, Wanza. I like any doings, 'most. I'll remember this birthday forever and ever, I know. Why, it's been the

funniest birthday! Mr. David has been on the river 'most all afternoon. I was 'most sure he'd forgot what day it was. But soon as I heard your cart, Wanza, I knew what it was—a surprise party! Like folks give ministers. And that was why Mr. David would not let on. I guess not many boys have spice cake on their birthday, and can help bake it, too."

I heard the sound of a kiss, and Wanza saying in a choked voice:

"There's a bit of store candy in that brown paper sack, Joey. My, the heat of the oven smarts my eyes! See, Joey! You can stone the raisins for me while I beat the eggs for the frosting."

"Of course Mr. David wouldn't forget my birthday," I heard my loyal lad resume as I stole forward to the door with my armful of wood, "I'm 'bout the same as his boy, ain't I, Wanza?"

I swung open the door, and dropping my load of wood to the floor, cried cheerily:

"Here's the wood to cook the boy's birthday supper, Wanza. Come and give me a hug, Joey. I think you're old enough to have a few nickels to spend, boy,—put your hand in my pocket, the pocket where we keep our jack-knife. There! What do you find?"

"A dollar," shrieked Joey with bulging eyes.

"It's yours," I said.

His eyes opened wide, gazed incredulously into mine; his face grew white; and then tears gushed forth. "And I thought—I thought you'd forgot my birthday," he sobbed.

Wanza's nose was pink when I turned to hold the oven door open for her. But her eyes were friendly, and her full, exquisite lips were smiling.

"It's going to be a perfectly grand cake," she breathed.

Joey had run whooping out of doors to bathe his face in the spring. Emboldened by the girl's smile I touched her smooth round cheek lightly.

"There's a tear here still, Wanza," I teased, though my voice was somewhat husky. "You're April's lady—sunshine and shadow—tears and laughter; but you're a good girl, Wanza, a fine staunch friend to Joey and me. Don't hold my thoughtlessness of to-day against me, please."

She dashed the drop away. Her cornflower blue eyes blazed suddenly into mine.

"I 'most hated you a little while ago, Mr. David Dale, when I knew why you'd forgotten poor Joey's birthday—" she hesitated, then repeated defiantly, "when I knew why you'd forgotten."

"Now," I said, challenging her, "I defy you to say why I forgot the lad's birthday."

"And I'll tell you why. Because you're thinking so much about the woman as has taken old Russell's cabin you haven't got time to remember other folks. Old Lundquist says you watch her light o' nights from Nigger Head."

"Lundquist is a meddlesome, prying old idiot," I cried angrily.

Seeing me aroused, Wanza's anger cooled. "I dare say he is," she admitted, as she stepped to the oven door. "Why should you be taken with a creature like her, I should like to know! Such a flabby, white-faced, helpless moon-calf."

She laughed, shut the oven door, straightened her fine shoulders and went to the window to cool her cheeks. I looked at her as she stood there, I saw her smile and wave her hand to Joey, who was performing sundry ablutions at the spring. She was wearing a collarless pink cotton frock, spotless and fresh as water and starch and fastidious ironing could make it; her face was as ardent as a flame, her eyes glowed deep and impassioned, her lips were smooth as red rose petals. Her mop of fine, blond curls was massed like a web of silk about her colorful face. I looked at

her with appreciation. But as I looked I sighed. Hearing my sigh she gave me an odd glance, then crossed the room and stood before me.

"Mr. Dale," she said soberly, "I am sorry I told you what old Lundquist said. I allow you've a right to watch a light on Hidden Lake if you've a mind to. Look ahere, do you want I should go and stay with her?"

"Why," I replied, "I think it would be kind, Wanza."

She bit her lip, shot a keen glance at me, and said shortly:

"Then I'll go, as soon as I have done my own house cleaning."

"You're a good girl, Wanza," I said again.

She turned from me, sniffing the air. "That cake's about done, I'll warrant. Call Joey, Mr. Dale, and I'll put the mush on the table, and see to the icing."

Somehow the meal did not pass off with the degree of festivity I had hoped for. Wanza watched me from under her thick lashes in a most disconcerting manner as we chatted desultorily, and my little lad was unusually silent. I felt that I had not atoned to Joey for the long, arduous day through which he had passed, that its memory lay like a shadow over the present gala

hour. To lighten it in some measure I ventured a proposal.

"Joey," I said, speaking abruptly as a silence threatened to engulf us, "how would you like to go gipsying with me for a few days?"

"Gipsying," Joey repeated. His face was illumined as he caught my eye and partially sensed my meaning. "Does gipsying mean living in a covered wagon, Mr. David, and cooking bacon on sticks over a camp fire?"

I nodded. "All that and more, Joey. It means wonderful things, lad. It means faring forth into the greenwood in a caravan in the rosy dawn of a summer day, finding the most alluring trail that leads to the most secretive of trout streams, lounging in the shade of spreading trees at noon time, eating a snack of bread and cheese, poring over a treasured book for an hour while you drowse back half dreaming to all the pleasant happenings of your youth. Then when it's cooler faring on again, till the sun begins to drop behind the mountains and hunger seizes you by the throat—"

I broke off, catching sight of Joey's rapt face. It was radiant and eager and wistful all at once.

"Mr. David," he said, pushing back his plate, "let's go!"

"If you don't go after saying what you've just said—" Wanza shook her head at me, and left her sentence unfinished.

"I could not have found it in my heart to paint such a picture, Wanza girl," I replied, "had I not intended to give Joey the opportunity to compare it with the reality. We will stretch the old tarpaulin over the ranch wagon in the morning, stow away some bacon and cornmeal and a frying pan, harness Buttons to the caravan, and go out into the greenwood to tilt a lance with fortune."

I laughed as I spoke; but a weariness of spirit that I had been struggling all the evening to combat lay heavily upon me. Well, would it be for me, I said to myself, to get away from Cedar Dale for a few days. I had felt an impelling hunger to see my wonder woman again; I had been restless for days consumed with the hunger; now I had seen her, and a new strange pain had been born to replace the former craving. I was in worse stress than before.

CHAPTER VIII

GIPSYING

IT was into the sunshine of a cloudless June morning that Joey and I fared in quest of adventure. Our caravan was well provisioned with necessities, well equipped with cooking utensils, stocked liberally with fishing tackle. And with a lively rattle and bang—we rolled out on to the river road and wheeled away at a goodly pace. I held the reins and Joey alternately piped on his flute and sang a lusty song about a "Quack with a feather on his back."

Despite the depression that obsessed me my spirits rose as we went on, and by noon when we were well into the heart of the deep lush woods beyond Roselake, I am sure Joey could have had no cause to complain of the gravity of his companion. Surely there is balm for wounded souls in the solitude of the greenwood. We found a spot where bracken waved waist high, where moss was green-gold and flowers were sprouting on rocks, where the very air was dreamful. I felt a

sudden electrification. My feet felt young and winged again; I lost all desires, all hopes, all fears; I only realized that I was unweighted. In this meeting with nature I was stripped and unhampered—unexpectedly free from the dragging bondage of the past few days.

We were on the mountain side, and waters poured down into the valley below us, waters that hinted of trout. Heights were to left and right of us, the sky stretched azure blue between, all about us were sequestered nooks where singing brooks played in and out among the green thickets.

"Shall we camp here, Joey," I asked, marking the satisfaction on his face.

"Oh, Mr. David, I was 'most afraid to ask! Seems as if we hadn't gone far enough. I should think gipsies would camp near trout streams, though."

He was already lifting our cooking kit from the caravan, his small brown face alert, his stout little hands trembling with their eagerness to assist in the unloading. We gave an hour to making camp. I built a fire between two flat stones, and Joey filled a kettle with water and placed it over the blaze, while I put my trout rod together, chose a fly carefully from my meagre

home-made assortment and went to the near-by stream.

I whipped the stream carefully for half an hour and succeeded in landing a half dozen trout. They made a meal fit for a king. And afterward Joey and I lay on the grass half dozing and watching a pair of violet-green swallows that had a nest in a hole in a cottonwood tree on the bank of the stream.

"Don't they like bird houses?" asked the small boy.

"They do," I replied. "They will welcome almost any tiny opening. They will go through a hole in any gable or cornice. They are industrious and painstaking; they have courage and patience. It is fine to have courage and patience, Joey." I was almost asleep, but thought it well to point a moral while I had his ear.

"What can you do with those two things, Mr. David, dear?"

"Almost anything, lad." I thought of Santa Teresa's book-mark: "Patient endurance attaineth to all things," and I clenched my hands involuntarily, and sat up.

"I see—it's going to be a story!"

I shook my head. "It's warm for stories. Try to rest, Joey."

He lay back obediently, and a hand stole out and stroked my hand.

"But, what, Mr. David—what can you do with courage and patience?"

The question came again, and found me still unprepared.

"What would you say, Joey?"

"Well," the clear, light tones ran on, "if you have patience you can make things—like cedar chests and tables and bird houses; you can fix things too—same as you do, Mr. David. Fixing is harder than making, I guess. 'Most anybody can make things—perhaps—I don't know for sure; but everybody can't fix things, like you can."

I gripped the small hand hard.

"What about courage, Joey?"

"Pooh! that's for fighting lions and—and coyotes. Every big man can kill lions. I'd liever fix boys' toys."

I dozed after a time, and from a doze drifted into refreshing slumber. I awoke to see silver shadows drawing in around me, overhead a half lit crescent moon, tender colors streaking the mountains. There was an appetizing smell of cooking on the air, and casting my eyes about I spied Joey very red-faced and stealthy, kneeling

beside the camp fire, holding a forked stick in his hand on which was impaled a generous strip of sizzling bacon. I saw a pan of well-browned potatoes hard by, and I rose on my elbow prepared to shout "Grub-pile," after the fashion of camp cooks, when I heard a strange, sibilant sound from a clump of aspens on the other side of the stream.

I listened. Tinkle, tinkle went the stream; swish, swish whispered the aspens and young maples; but surely that was a human voice droning a curious, lazy chant. I fixed my eyes on the aspen thicket. Presently there came a strange rustling, a vague movement beyond the leafy screen. I waited. Soon a brown hand parted the branches, two bright eyes peered through. As I rose to my feet a slight wiry figure in the fantastic garb of a gipsy darted from the bushes, leaped the stream, and sprang into the little clearing by the fire. I saw a brown face, poppy red lips, and a pair of dancing eyes, shadowed by hair black as midnight. I bent a sharp scrutiny upon the intruder as she stood there in the uncertain light, but with a petulant movement she drew the peaked scarlet cap she wore lower over her face, and wrapped the long folds of her voluminous cape more closely about her.

"Let the gipsy cook your bacon," she said in an odd throaty voice to Joey.

Joey with big-eyed wonder relinquished the forked stick and dripping bacon strip, and the gipsy tossed back her cape, freeing her arms, and began a deft manipulation of the primitive implement, turning it round and round, now plunging it almost into the heart of the fire, now drawing it away and waving it just beyond the reach of the leaping flames. When I drew near with the coffee pot in my hand, and essayed another glance at her face, it was too dark for me to see her features plainly. I had only a dizzying glimpse of wonderful liquid orbs, white teeth and wreathed berry-red lips.

When the meal was ready she ate ravenously, almost snatching at the food with which Joey plied her. The light from the fire played over her picturesque attire, shone in her eyes and danced on the tawdry ornaments she wore. She had seated herself with her back against a log; her cape had fallen away, disclosing a coarse white blouse and short skirt of green; about her slim waist she wore a sash of red. In her ears were hoops of gold; each time she tossed her head they danced riotously; and with every movement of her brown arms the bracelets on her wrists

THE GYPSY TOSSED BACK HER CAPE

jangled. I glanced at her suspiciously from time to time. But Joey's delight was beyond bounds. He was so frankly overjoyed at the gipsy's presence that once or twice he giggled outright when she looked at him. I saw an answering flash in her eyes. Of speech she was chary, and all my efforts to draw her into conversation were futile.

She made no attempt to assist Joey and me with the clearing away of the remains of the repast, watching us from under sleepy lids without changing her position against the log; but when we came back to the fire after our work was finished, and I stretched out with a luxurious yawn, she smiled at me and mumbled:

"The poor gipsy girl can tell your fortune."

"I don't believe you're a Romany," I said sharply, "you're much too good looking, and too clean."

She drew back, resentment in her bearing, and I made haste to placate her by saying:

"The fact is, I have had my fortune told so often by gipsies in the vicinity of Roselake that there is no novelty in it."

She frowned, and I asked, trying to speak pleasantly, "Where is your encampment?"

She pointed towards the West. "There! Way off," she grunted.

We sat for a long while in silence. The darkness was like a glorious, blurred, mist-hung web, closing in beyond the circle of light cast by our camp fire. The crescent moon shone palely, but the stars were like crimson fires in the nest of night. There was a smell of honey on the wind, a pungency of pine, a mingling of mellow odors; and over all this the cleanness of the woods that was like a tonic.

Joey yawned finally, his head fell over heavily against my arm, and I said, "Bed-time, Joey!"

"As for me," the gipsy muttered, rolling over with an indolent, cat-like movement on the soft moss, "I sleep here. This is a good bed. You sleep in the wagon?"

"Yes," I replied.

"Good! The encampment is far away. I will not go through the woods to-night. Not me." She covered her face with her cape. I heard a prodigious yawn. "Good night," she said, in a muffled tone.

I stowed Joey away on a bed of hemlock boughs in the wagon, and after I had satisfied myself that he slept, I returned to the fire. I knelt beside the shrouded figure.

"Wanza Lyttle," I said sternly, "uncover your face and look at me."

She kicked out ruthlessly with both copper-toed shoes, wriggled angrily beneath her cape, and then lay quiet.

"Do you think, Wanza, you should have followed us in this shameless fashion,—and in this disguise?"

"I don't see why I shouldn't, if I wanted to," a surly voice replied from the folds of the cape.

"You are always doing inconceivable, silly things," I went on. "How did you get here?"

"I followed you on horseback. Rosebud is tethered a ways back in the woods."

"What will your father say to this? What will the entire village say when the busybodies learn of it?"

"Father isn't at home; he's at Harrison. As for the others,—" Wanza sat up, and cast the cape from her—"little I care for their talk."

"I wish you cared more for public opinion, Wanza."

"Public fiddlesticks," Wanza growled, crossly.

Suddenly she laughed with child-like naïveté, her eyes grew bright with roguery.

"You did not know me just at first, now did you? The black wig, and staining my face and

hands fooled you all right for awhile. Don't I look like a gipsy? I did it to please Joey—partly—and partly because—oh, Mr. Dale, I wanted to come with you! It sounded so fine—what you said about the greenwood and the caravan. Do you hate me for following?"

What could I say?

I made her as comfortable as I could there on the soft moss, with a couple of blankets, heaped fresh wood on the fire, and then I crawled in beside Joey and lay pondering on this latest prank of madcap Wanza. I saw the moon grow brighter and pass from my vision, I saw the stars wheel down the sky towards the west, and dawn come up like a delicate mincing lady, and then I slept.

Joey stood beside me when I awakened. He had a scarlet ribbon in his hand.

"The gipsy's gone, Mr. David," he said. "I found this hanging on an elder bush."

I breathed a sigh of thankfulness.

"So she's gone," I murmured, not venturing to meet his eyes.

"She was a beautiful gipsy," he continued regretfully. "Do you know, Mr. David, I think she was almost—not quite—but almost as pretty

as Wanza. I guess there never was any one prettier than Wanza, 'cept—" he hesitated.

"Yes, Joey? Except?"

"Is the wonder woman prettier?" He put the question wistfully.

"Perhaps not—I do not know, Joey." Could I say in truth she was? remembering the face I had seen in the firelight.

But that night after Joey was tucked away in the covered wagon the gipsy came again. I raised my eyes from the fire to see her coming through the long grass toward me. She came springing along, her bare arms thrusting back the low hanging tree branches, her short skirt swirling above her bare feet.

I went to meet her. Her manner was bashful, and her eyes were imploring. And after I had greeted her she was tongue-tied.

"Now that you are here, come to the fire," I said.

She shrank from me like a tristful child.

"Come," I said. "And tell me why you have come back."

"I haven't come back—exactly. I have been in the woods all day near here."

"Why have you done this?"

"I don't know."

She hung her head and looked up from under her curtain of hair.

I threw a fresh log on the fire and she seated herself. I stood looking down at her half in anger, half in dismay.

"Are you hungry? Have you eaten to-day?" I asked.

"I have all the food I need in the saddle bags."

I seated myself then, and as there seemed nothing more to say I was silent. But I looked at her in deep perplexity from time to time. She was flushed, and her eyes were burning. Her hair was tangled about her neck and veiled her bosom. She faced me, wide-eyed and silent.

It was deeply dark in the hill-hollows by now, but the sky was a lighter tone, and the stars seemed to burn more brightly than usual. There was no faintest stirring of wind. The silence was intense, bated, you could feel it, vibrating about you. The trees were heavy black masses, shadowing us. I heard a coyote yelp away off on some distant hill side, and the sound but made the ensuing silence more pronounced.

Presently Wanza spoke: "I wish I was a real gipsy," she said. Her tone was subdued, there was something softened and wistful in it. "All

day long I have had the time I've always wanted, to do nothing in. I waded in the spring. I slept hours in the shade. I drank milk and ate bread. I bought the milk at a ranch house way up on the side of the mountain. Glory! It was great! I hadn't a single dish to wash. It's all right when you're rich—everything is, I guess. But when you're squeezy poor and uneducated and of no account, and you're housekeeper and peddler and Lord knows what! You don't get no chance to have a good time. Now, do you, Mr. David Dale?"

Her words aroused me somewhat rudely from a reverie into which I had drifted, so that I answered abstractedly: "Perhaps not, girl."

"Well, you don't. What chance do I get?" She stared fixedly at the fire. "I have to work, work, work, when all the time I feel like kicking up my heels like a colt in a pasture." There was a strained, uneven quality in her tone that was foreign to it. I saw that she was terribly in earnest.

"A gipsy's life isn't all play, Wanza. It's all right in poetry! And it's all right for a gipsy. But Wanza Lyttle is better off in her peddler's cart."

"Well, I'd just like to try it for awhile!"

I remembered a song I had heard in Spokane —at Davenport's roof garden—on a rare occasion when an artist chap who had spent some weeks at my shack had insisted on putting me up for a day or two while I visited the art shops in the city. It was a haunting thing, with a flowing happy lilt. I had been unable to forget it, and without thinking now, I sang it.

"Down the world with Marna!
That's the life for me!
Wandering with the wandering wind
Vagabond and unconfined!
Roving with the roving rain
Its unboundaried domain!
Kith and kin of wander-kind
Children of the sea!
Petrels of the sea-drift!
Swallows of the lea!
Arabs of the whole wide girth
Of the wind-encircled earth!
In all climes we pitch our tents,
Cronies of the elements
With the secret lords of birth
Intimate and free."

"Go on," Wanza breathed tensely, as I paused.
"Have you never heard it?"
"Never!"
I sang lightly:

"Marna with the trees' life
In her veins astir!
Marna of the aspen heart
Where the sudden quivers start!
Quick-responsive, subtle, wild!
Artless as an artless child,
Spite of all her reach of art!
Oh, to roam with her!"

"Is there more?" Wanza queried as I again paused.

"Oh, yes! It's rather long." I bent forward and gave the fire a poke. "That's about enough for one evening, isn't it?"

"No, no! I want to hear it all. Oh, go on, Mr. Dale, please!"

"Marna with the wind's will,
Daughter of the sea!
Marna of the quick disdain,
Starting at the dream of stain!
At a smile with love aglow,
At a frown a statued woe,
Standing pinnacled in pain
Till a kiss sets free!"

Wanza was very silent as I finished. I felt strangely silent, too, and weighted with a slight melancholy. But the singing of the song had put an end to Wanza's plaint. Her face had lost its peevish lines and grown normal again. The

fire burned low, a wind came up from the west and blew the ashes in our faces, there was a weird groaning from the pine trees. The quiet of the night had changed to unrest, overhead the sky had grown darker, the stars brighter. We continued to sit side by side in brooding quiet, until the fire had burnt its heart out, and the air became more chill, and drowsiness began to tug at our eyelids.

I arose then. "Light of my tent," I said with gay camaraderie, "I will bring the blankets from the wagon for you, and since you are to sleep here you may as well stay and breakfast with Joey and me."

She looked up at me oddly, sitting cross-legged close to the fire, the light spraying over her dusky carmined cheeks. "Say the words of that gipsy thing again," she urged.

"I can't sing any more to-night, girl."

"Don't sing—say the words."

The evening had been so frictionless, that I made haste to comply with this very modest demand; but when I came to the last verse I stumbled, and in spite of myself my voice softened and fired at the witchery of the words:

"Marna with the wind's will,
Daughter of the sea!

Marna of the quick disdain,
Starting at the dream of stain!
At a smile with love aglow,
At a frown a statued woe,
Standing pinnacled in pain
Till a kiss sets free!"

Wanza rose and came close to me as I finished. Her black elf-locks brushed my shoulder. "If I was a gipsy and you was a gipsy," she whispered, "things would be different."

I saw her eyes. Some of the tenderness of the last few lines of the song was in my voice as I whispered back, "How different, child?"

I stood looking down at her, and her eyes—burningly blue—sank into mine. The wind tossed her hair out. A strand brushed my lips. She seemed an unknown alien maid, in her disguise, and in the shifting pink light from the low burning fire. I took a bit of her hair in my hand and I looked into her face curiously. I stood thus for a long moment, catching my breath fiercely, staring, staring—her hands held mine, her scarf of red silk whipped my throat—how strangely beautiful her face, the full lids, the subtle chin, the delicate yet warm lips! Had I ever seen as beautiful a girl-face? The soft wind swept past us sweet with balm o' Gilead; the

brook was awake and singing to the rushes; but the birds were asleep, and a sweet solitude was ours. This girl was of my world, all gipsy she, wilder than most. And I—was I not as wide a wanderer as any gipsy? as homeless? I smiled into the eyes that smiled into mine, and I hummed below my breath:

"Standing pinnacled in pain
Till a kiss sets free!"

Yes, the face of this girl was a marvelous thing, a perfect bit of chiselling. Brow, cheeks, nose, chin, shell-like ears—exquisitely modelled. Had I ever looked at her before? What rare perfection there was in her face. And her nature was rich—rich! Her soul—

Ah, her soul!

Suddenly it was Wanza, my comrade, Joey's staunch friend and playmate, into whose eyes I looked. The gipsy was gone. The glamour was gone. Enchantment and madness were gone. I stood by a dying fire in a wind-stirred forest, with the roughened hands of a country wench in mine. But though she was only a country wench I admired and respected her. And when she whispered again as I moved away from the touch of her hands: "Things would be dif-

ferent if we was gipsies," I replied: "Perhaps so, Wanza. But we are not gipsies. So let us not even play at gipsying."

I went to the wagon for the baskets.

The next morning the gipsy was gone, and that was the last I saw of her.

CHAPTER IX

THE BIG MAN

SOME two weeks later Joey informed me that he could play "Bell Brandon" on his flute. I doubt if any one familiar with the piece would have recognized it as rendered by Joey on the futile instrument I had carved. The air being unfamiliar to me I asked him where he had picked it up.

"Oh," he said carelessly, "she plays it on her guitar."

I was growing accustomed to the sight of Joey, followed by the collie, marching sturdily away down the yew path each day as soon as the dinner dishes were done, and I had more than once remonstrated with him on the frequency of his visits to Hidden Lake. His answer was invariably the same. "She says, 'Come again,' every time, Mr. David."

"That's only a way people have of being polite," I protested at last, and was surprised to see the hurt tears in his eyes.

That night he came home radiant.

"She doesn't say 'Come again' to be polite,"

he announced, throwing his cap in a corner and speaking blusteringly. "She didn't ask Mr. Lundquist to come again. She only said, 'When I need you again I'll let you know.' "

The perfect weather changed about this time, and sultry nights, alternating with days like hot coals, ensued, until, suddenly, one evening at dusk, the wind came up with a roar, and scurrying leaves and particles of dust filled the air. The dust storm enveloped us. It sang and poured and hissed up and down the river, the temperature kept dropping lower and lower, rain and hail descended, and the wind grew more tempestuous as darkness came on.

As I pored over a volume of Tacitus that evening, glowing with the sense of well being that the warmth of the fire and the cheer of the light cast by my green-shaded light imparted in contrast to the storm without, there came a vigorous knocking at the cabin door.

Joey, dozing on his stool before the fire, sat upright with a start, and the collie growled and ruffled his back. A curious prescience of disaster assailed me with that knock; a grim finger seemed laid on my heart-strings—I seemed to feel the touch of a cold iron hand arresting me on a well-ordered, dearly familiar path.

Joey sprang to the door, opened it wide, and a gust of wind tore it from his hand. The rain swept into the cabin, and a man carrying a suitcase came quickly forward from the darkness beyond, crossed the threshold, and stood in the glare of the firelight.

He was a tall man, powerfully built, but he walked with a slovenly gait, and something pompous and hard and withal insincere rang in his tones as he set down his suitcase and spoke:

"Pardon my intrusion, my man. Your light attracted me. It's blacker than Egypt outside, and I've lost my way in the storm."

He rolled back the collar of his slicker coat and shook the raindrops from the brim of his hat.

"Take off your coat," I said hospitably, "and come up to the fire."

He thanked me, favored me with a patronizing glance from his full-lidded light eyes, and stood rocking back and forth on the bearskin rug before the fire, rubbing his hands.

"I shall have to hurry on to Roselake if I am to get there to-night. Perhaps you will show me the trail, my man."

I assured him that I would direct him, then realizing that the man was chilled through, I threw a fresh log on the fire, and going to a cup-

board in the chimney-corner, took down a bottle and a small glass and placed them on the table.

"Have a drink," I said, "it will save you from a bad cold on a night like this."

"Thanks. Don't mind if I do." He filled his glass, and as he did so his glance fell on the book I had been reading. His manner changed. "'Tacitus'! Rather grim reading for a wild night like this." He turned a page unsteadily, and followed a line with his finger. "Mm! Nero, the fiddler—it's ghastly reading—bestial, rather. Cramming for anything?"

"No," I replied.

"Take something lighter—'Abbe Constantine,' 'Hyperion,' 'The Snow Man.'"

His voice was thick; and as he stood resting his hand on a chair back, he lurched slightly.

"Sit down," I said.

He sank into the armchair and raised his glass, waving it in my direction, then he rose to his feet, bowed, and said: "Your health, sir," and drank thirstily. I saw them that he had been imbibing more than was good for him, but I could also see that he was literally sodden with fatigue, and something impelled me to offer him food.

"Now that's kind—very kind," he said throatily. "I could not think—" He reeled

back against the chair and put his hand to his head suddenly.

I signaled to Joey, who left the room, and I went to the man and eased him into the depth of the chair.

"Rest here awhile and have something hot to eat," I suggested.

His head sank on his chest, his lids dropped over his prominent eyes. "Yes—'Abbe Constantine'—or 'Hyperion'—'Hyperion,' preferably," he mumbled. "Weak, disgusting fool—Nero!"

He roused sufficiently to eat a few mouthfuls when Joey and I served him royally with good corned-beef and hominy, and a steaming pot of coffee. But he sank again into lethargy, and I saw that he was in no condition to push on to Roselake in the storm.

I told him so frankly, and pointed to a built-in bunk covered with hemlock boughs in the corner. "Turn in here," I said, giving him a couple of blankets. "I'll bunk with the lad tonight."

I had taken great pains with Joey's room, and the narrow cedar strips with which I had paneled it shone with a silver lustre in the light of the two candles Joey insisted on lighting in my

honor. Joey's bed was a boxed-in affair, but I had contrived to make it comfortable by stretching stout bed-cord from the head to the foot and interlacing it across from side to side. This served in lieu of springs. The mattress was a crude one of straw, but the straw was sweet and clean, and Wanza had pieced a wonderful bed quilt of shawl-flower pattern calico, and presented it to Joey the year before when he had the measles. The bed had a valance of blue burlap, and I had painstakingly stenciled it with birds and beasts and funny fat clowns and acrobatic ladies in short skirts and tights, after a never-to-be-forgotten circus-day parade Joey had witnessed in the village.

There was a gayly striped Indian blanket for covering, and pillows stuffed with the feathers of many a mallard slaughtered in the marshes. I had converted a couple of barrels into chairs and covered them with tea matting. For floor covering there were the skin of a mountain lion that had prowled too close to my cabin one night, and the skins of a couple of coyotes that had ventured within shooting distance.

In one of the windows hung the wooden cage I had made for Joey's magpie. But the windows themselves were my chief pride. I had procured

them from an old house-boat that had been abandoned by a party of fishermen, and had drifted down the river to anchor itself before my workshop. There were four of these windows, with tiny mullioned panes, and I had hung them, two on either side of a door that opened out on a rustic pergola I had erected. The pergola led to a bosky dell of green—a veritable bower—where wild honeysuckle hung its bells in the sweet syringa bushes, and wild forget-me-not and violets and kinnikinic gemmed the emerald banks of a limpid pool so hedged in by high green thickets that no eye save the initiated ever rested on its crystal clarity. We called this spot the Dingle Dell, and the Dingle was a rare retreat for Joey on the occasion of any embarrassing caller.

As I blew out the candles that night and lay down beside the little lad, he murmured sleepily: "Bell Brandon ain't so terrible hard to play on the flute—but it's terrible hard on a guitar; a guitar makes blisters on your fingers."

He spoke again almost unintelligibly. "I don't like that man. He never spoke to me once, Mr. David. Any one, 'most, speaks to a boy."

In the middle of the night I awakened. Joey was sitting up in bed.

"A star's out, Mr. David. I'm making a wish," he whispered.

"Well, well," I yawned drowsily, "lie down—you'll take cold."

He cuddled obediently beneath the blankets. "I'm wishing the big man would go, but I'm wishing you'd sleep with me just the same, Mr. David. I sleep tighter when the coyotes holler."

CHAPTER X

JINGLES BRINGS A MESSAGE

JOEY did not get his wish concerning the departure of the big man, for the next morning the big man was in no condition to go anywhere. He was still lying in his bunk when I went through the room to build the kitchen fire; and when breakfast was ready, he had not roused even to the strains of "Bell Brandon" played on Joey's flute.

I stood over him, and he looked up at me with lack-lustre eyes, attempted to rise and rolled back on his pillow like a log.

"Morning, stranger," he muttered. He winked at me slyly. His face was puffy and red, his eyes swollen, his breathing irregular and labored. "What's matter?" he protested thickly, then he smiled, with a painful contortion of his fever-seared lips, "I seem to be *hors de combat.* Terrible pain here." He touched his chest.

"I'll get a doctor at once," I said.

He thanked me, gave me a keen look, and

asked wheezingly: "Not married? No wife about?"

I shook my head. "Unfortunately, no."

He winked at me a second time. *"Lascia la moglie e tienti donzello,"* he cackled.

I went from the room pondering on the strange personality of this man, who was unquestionably a scholar, and who, no doubt, considered himself a gentleman. I despatched Joey for a doctor.

"Take Buttons and ride to Roselake as fast as you can," I bade him. "Where's the collie? He may go along."

Joey, basking in the sun on the back steps, laid aside his flute. His lips drew down, and his eyes bulged widely.

"The big man's going to stay, then, Mr. David?"

"Run along," I said sharply.

As I let down the meadow bars, Joey turned in his saddle and gave his clear boyish whistle. But no Jingles answered the call, and a moment later the lad rode away with a clouded face.

A few moments later, as I plied my ax at the rear of the cabin, the cold muzzle of the collie was thrust against my hand. I stooped to caress him, and as he leaped up to greet me, I smiled as my eyes caught the color and the sheen of a

silken ribbon threaded through his collar. Well, I knew that bit of adornment—that azure fillet that Haidee had worn in her hair.

I touched the inanimate thing with tender fingers, and started suddenly to find a jeweled pendant hanging there, glowing like a dewdrop against the dog's soft fur. I stood agape, feeling my face soften as my fingers stroked the bauble; and then I straightened up with a swift presentiment. It was in no playful mood that Haidee had placed that costly gewgaw about the collie's neck.

I turned toward the stable, and then remembered that Joey had taken the horse. My only recourse was the canoe. I ran to the willows where the craft was secreted. I had it afloat in a twinkling, and was paddling away down the river, the collie barking furiously on the shore.

Poor pale, beautiful Haidee! She lay like a crumpled white rose in the bracken beside the spring. The white fir-tree that, in falling, had crushed the lean-to of the frail cabin had swept her beneath its branches as she bent for water at the spring. This was the story I read for myself as I bent above my prostrate girl. But it was many days before I learned the whole truth. How, close onto midnight, she had heard a man

hallooing from the lake shore; how she had stolen out from the cabin in the storm, fearing an intrusion from some drunken reveler from the village tavern; how, after the tree had fallen and pinned her fast with its cruel branches, she had lain unconscious until with the first streak of light she had felt the touch of the collie's muzzle against her face; how she had roused, and, her hands being free, had torn the ribbon from her hair and bound it about the collie's neck, and, as an afterthought, attached the pendant from her throat, thinking the ribbon alone might not occasion surprise.

She told me all this, days afterward; but when I reached her side, she was incapable of speech, and only a flutter of her white lids denoted that she was conscious.

I had a bad half hour alone there in the bracken, watching her face grow grayer and grayer as I worked to dislodge the branches that were pinning her down. And, at last, as I lifted her in my arms, I saw the last particle of color drain from her lips, and realized that she had fainted. But I had her in my arms, and her heart was beating faintly. And, someway, hope leaped up and I felt courageous and strong, as I bore her to the river and placed her in the canoe.

Joey was kneeling among the willows with his arms clasping Jingles as I beached my canoe near the workshop.

"I knew something had happened to Bell Brandon," he declared, in big-eyed misery. "I knew it! I knew it!" He took the crumpled bit of ribbon from the dog's neck with hands that trembled, and came forward slowly. I was unprepared for the look of abject misery on his small face. "Oh, Mr. David," he quavered, "don't tell me she is dead!"

"No, no, lad," I said hastily, "she has only fainted."

He looked at me uncertainly, tried to smile, and a tear dropped on the ribbon in his hands. Then a look of joy made his face luminous. "The doctor's here, Mr. David. I didn't know I was abringing him for Bell Brandon. I thought it was just for the big man."

So Joey had a name for my wonder woman, too. I could not but feel that his name was the sweeter of the two.

I bore Haidee through the room where the doctor was in attendance on the big man, who was by this time raving and incoherent in his delirium, passed swiftly through the small hallway that separated the cedar room from the main

one, and laid Haidee on Joey's bed. Then I brought the doctor. I left Haidee in his hands, and Joey and I passed outside to the Dingle, and stood there silently, side by side, by the pool.

I saw the green mirror flecked with the white petals of the syringa, and I heard a squirrel chattering in the hemlock above my head, and was conscious of a calliope humming-bird that pecked at the wool of my sweater. But my whole soul was in that cedar room, where Haidee lay white and suffering, and I was repeating a prayer that had been on my mother's lips often when I was a child as she had bent over me in my small bed:

"Oh, Lord, keep my dear one! Deliver us from murder and from sudden death—Good Lord, deliver us!"

But Haidee's condition was not serious. The doctor came out to us, Joey and me, with the assurance, and at once the world began to wag evenly with me. "All she needs now is rest," he said suavely. "She will now be able to rest for some time. You'd better get a woman here, Dale, to help out. Mrs. Batterly mentioned it. There'll have to be a trained nurse for the man."

In the workshop Joey and I considered the situation in all its phases, and Joey sagely counseled: "Send for Wanza."

The suggestion seemed a wise one, so I penned a careful note, and Joey rode away to the village for the second time that day.

In my note I said:

Dear Wanza:

I am in trouble. Mrs. Batterly has met with an accident, and is here at my cabin, unable to be moved. I have also a very sick man—a stranger—on my hands. Joey and I need you—will you come?

Your old friend,
DAVID DALE.

Wanza responded gallantly to my call for aid. In a couple of hours I heard the rattle of her cart and the jingle of harness, and the sound of Buttons' hoof-beats on the river road, and emerged from my workshop to greet her.

She stepped down from the shelter of the pink-lined umbrella, and answered my greeting with great circumspection. I lifted down her bag and a big bundle, Joey carried her sweater and a white-covered basket, and together we escorted her to the cabin and made an imposing entrance.

The big man, tossing about in his bunk in the front room, ceased his confused mutterings as we crossed the threshold, struggled up to his elbow, stared, and pointed his finger at Wanza. *"La*

beauté sans vertu est une fleur sans parfum," he said indistinctly.

Wanza stared back at him, ignorant of the import of his words; and as I frowned at him, he threw up both hands and drifted into dribbling incoherence. I pointed to the door at the end of the room, and Wanza went to it swiftly, opened it quietly, and passed through to Haidee.

When I went to the kitchen, after giving the big man a spoonful of the medicine the doctor had left, I found Joey on the floor, with his arms about the collie's neck.

"I can trust you," he was saying, "I can trust those eyes, those marble-est eyes! Why, if it hadn't been for you, Jingles, Bell Brandon could never a let Mr. David know."

The stage stopped at Cedar Dale late that afternoon, and set down the trained nurse. And our curious ménage was complete.

The nurse proved to be a sandy-haired, long-nosed pessimist, a woman of fifty, capable, but so sunk in pessimism that Joey's blandishments failed to win her, and Jingles stood on his hind legs, and pawed his face in vain.

All through supper she discoursed of microbes and the dangerous minerals in spring water. She read us a lesson on cleanliness, repudiated the

soda in the biscuits, and looked askance at the liberal amount of cream I took in my coffee.

"Cream has a deleterious effect on the liver," she informed me, looking down her nose sourly, while Joey wrinkled his small face, appeared distressed at the turn the conversation was taking, and gasped forth:

"Why, Mr. David, do people have livers same as chickens?"

Mrs. Olds sniffed, Wanza looked out of the window and bit her lips, and I shook my head at Joey.

"My dear Mrs. Olds," I said cheerfully, "there is nothing the matter with my liver, I assure you."

She looked me over critically, inquired my age, and when I told her thirty-two, remarked darkly that I was young yet.

When Wanza and I were left alone in the kitchen, I had time to observe Wanza's hair. It made me think of the flaxen curls on the heads of the French dolls I had seen displayed in the shop-windows at Christmas time. Each curl was crisp and glossy, and hung in orderly, beauteous exactness, and the little part in the centre of her head was even, and white as milk. Palely as her hair was wont to gleam, it shone still paler now, until in some lights it was almost of silvery fair-

ness and indescribable sheen. Beneath it, her blue eyes looked almost black, her complexion had the rare whiteness of alabaster. There could be no two opinions on the subject—Wanza had washed her hair.

I knocked together a crude cot covered with a bit of canvas, on which Mrs. Olds and Wanza were to take turns sleeping in the kitchen, and I soldered an old canteen to be used as a hot-water bottle at the big man's feet. And I did sundry small errands that Mrs. Olds required of me before I was dismissed for the night. But when Joey and I closed the kitchen door behind us and stole away in the darkness beneath the yews to our new sleeping quarters in the workshop, I went with an effulgent glow and rapture at my heart. She was beneath my roof. She was eating my bread. The room on which I had labored through many an arduous day out of love and compassion for Joey had become a haven of refuge for my wonder woman.

CHAPTER XI

THE KICKSHAW

THE doctor came early the next morning and he rendered me incredibly favorable reports of both his patients; so that I was able to buoy myself up with the hope of seeing Haidee before many days had passed. She sent me a series of charming messages by Wanza throughout the day. The first message was to the effect that the room was delicious and the bed like down. Again—the air through the open windows and door was sweet as the breath of asphodel. And the last message said that the outlook through the windows was so sylvan that almost she expected to hear the pipes of Pan, or see a faun perched upon the rocks, or a Psyche at the pool.

I hugged these gracious words to my heart, and began work at once on a reclining-chair in which Haidee could rest during her convalescence, and the fashioning of two little crutches of cedar, the doctor having confided to me that when Haidee

left her bed she would require the support of crutches for a week or two.

The second day, the message from the cedar room thrilled me: "Tell Mr. Dale that I have been lifted high on my pillows where I can watch Joey at work in the Dingle." Later on the question came: "Joey is making something. What is it?"

Joey was passing through the kitchen when I received this message. I called to him: "What are you doing in the Dingle, Joey?"

"Pooh," he said, puffing out his cheeks, "I'm not doing anything!"

"Nothing at all, Joey?"

"I'm just covering a cedar round for a—a hassock for her—Bell Brandon's feet when she sits up. I'm covering it with the skin of that mink you trapped last fall."

I duly reported this to Wanza. She looked at me, tossed her head, and went quickly back to the cedar room. I began to think Mrs. Olds' pessimism was infecting her. Certainly my bright, insouciant Wanza seemed changed to me since her installation at Haidee's bedside.

I received messages too, from the sick man, but disjointed, vague outbursts that showed his mind was still wandering in the realms of fantasy.

"Tell my host," he begged Mrs. Olds, "that I'm a sick man—a very sick man. Tell him I say I'm a gentleman—a perfect gentleman. Tell him he's a gentleman, too. *Noblesse oblige* —and all that sort of thing, you know."

Mrs. Olds gathered that he was a mining man from Alaska, with interests in the Cœur d'Alenes, and that his name was Bailey. She had discovered a leather wallet in his coat pocket with the name in gold letters on the flap, and his linen was marked with a B. Pending absolute certainty that his name was Bailey, we all, with the exception of Mrs. Olds, continued to designate him "the big man"; and as days went on, Joey added to this and called him the big bad man, for his language waxed coarser. He was almost violent at times, and I was glad that the tiny corridor separated Haidee's room from the one in which he lay.

The doctor diagnosed his case as typhoid, and promised us a speedy convalescence. He looked at me significantly and added: "He'll recover. But when he goes to that unknown bourne, finally, he may not depart by a route as respectable by far. He's a periodical drinker—about all in. Can't stand much more."

A few days after this I received an unexpected

order for a cedar chest from a writer who signed herself Janet Jones, and directed that the chest when completed, should be sent to Spokane.

"I have seen your cedar chests," she wrote. "And how I want one! I am a shut in—and I want the beauty chest in my boudoir, because it will remind me of the cool, green cedars in the depth of the forest, of wood aisles purpling at twilight, of ferns and grass and all the plushy, dear, delightful things that bend and blow and flaunt themselves in the summer breeze. When I look at it, I am sure I can hear again the voice of the tortuous, swift-running, shadowy river on whose banks it was made. And I long to hear that sound again."

The check she enclosed was a generous one. The letter seemed almost a sacred thing to me. I folded it carefully and laid it away, and not even to Joey did I mention the order I had received. But I began work at once on the cedar chest. And I labored faithfully, and with infinite relish. The check was a material help to me, and something prompted me to lay bare my heart and tell my new friend so in the note of thanks I penned her that night.

"The wood paths are overrun with kinnikinic, lupine, and Oregon grape just now," I wrote,

"and the woods are in their greenest livery. The paint brushes are just coming into bloom and the white flowers on the salmon berry bushes were never so large before, or the coral honeysuckle so fragrant. My senses tell me this is so; but there is a deeper green in the heart of the woods, a tenderer purple on the mountains, because of one who bides temporarily beneath my roof. And because of her—oh, kind benefactress, I thank you for your order, for your praise, and for your check! I am poor—miserably poor. And for the first time in eight years ashamed of it."

The answer came back in a few days:

"Don't be ashamed! Tell me of her, please."

Because the hour of Haidee's convalescence when I could greet her face to face, was postponed from day to day, and because my thoughts were full of her, I was glad to answer this letter. But after all I told Janet Jones very little of Haidee, except that she was my guest, and that Joey and I called her our Wonder Woman, and that my own name for her was Haidee.

Each day that followed was well rounded out with work. The workshop proved to be a veritable house of refuge to Joey and me, whither we fled to escape Mrs. Olds' whining voice and bickering, and the big man's unsavory language.

Here with windows wide to the breeze that swept cool and clean from the mountains we labored side by side, forgetting the discord within the cabin, realizing only that it is good to live, to labor and to love.

In addition to my work on the cedar chest I was carving a design of spirea on a small oak box, which when completed was to hold Joey's few but highly prized kickshaws. As the design approached completion I observed the small boy eyeing it almost with dissatisfaction from time to time.

I was unused to this attitude in Joey, and one day I asked, "Don't you like it, lad?"

A spray of the graceful spirea lay on my work bench. He picked it up, caressed it gently, and laid it aside.

"Oh, Mr. David," he said, "I do think spirea, the pink kind, is the cunningest bush that grows!"

"I had reference to the box, Joey."

His eyes met mine honestly. A flush crept up to his brow through the tan.

"I almost say Gracious Lord! every time I look at it, and you asked me not to say that any more, Mr. David. It must be 'most as beautiful as that fairy box you told me about one day, that the girl carried in her arms when the

boatman poled her across that black river. I do think you're most too good to me."

I knew then that my boy liked the box beyond cavil.

But I reached the heart of his feeling with regard to the trifle the following day. As I bent over my work he said tentatively:

"I think we ought to do something for Wanza. She's doing a lot for us, isn't she, Mr. David?"

I glanced up. Joey was sitting cross-legged on my work bench, engaged in putting burrs together in the shape of a basket.

"Yes," I replied, "Wanza is very kind."

"Then if you don't mind, Mr. David—really truly don't mind—I'd like to give the kickshaw box to her."

The brown eyes that came up to mine were imploring, the small tanned face was suddenly aquiver with emotion. I laid my tools aside, and looked thoughtfully out of the window.

"Wanza's awfully good to me, Mr. David," the small boy continued. "She's put patches on my overalls, and sewed buttons on my shirts, and darned my stockings—and the other day she made me a kite. And she plays cat's cradle with me, and brings me glass marbles. And when she gets rich she's going to buy me a gold-fish."

"What a formidable list of good deeds. The box is Wanza's," I declared, facing around. "We will present it to her this evening."

"Do you 'spose she has any kickshaws to put in it, Mr. David?"

"Why—I don't know, lad, I don't know," I replied musingly. "It seems to me very probable."

"Do girls have kickshaws, Mr. David?"

"Almost every one has some sort of keepsake, Joey lad."

He surveyed his burr basket with disfavor, tore it apart and began hurriedly to build it over.

"Say the kickshaw verse for me, Mr. David, please, and after that the 'Nine Little Goblins,' and after that a little bit of 'Tentoleena.' "

It was very pleasant there in the shop. The perfume of summer was about us, and bird-song and bee-humming and the mellow sound of the brook blended into a delicate wood symphony. I looked out upon the swift running, sparkling, clear river. To dip boyishly in it was my sudden desire. The leafy green of the banks was likewise inviting. Across the river the grey-blue meadows stretched away to meet the purple foot hills. I hung half way out of the window and recited the tuneful little rhyme for Joey:

"Oh, the tiny little kickshaw that Mither sent tae me,
'Tis sweeter than the sugar-plum that reepens on the tree,
Wi' denty flavorin's o' spice an' musky rosemarie,
The tiny little kickshaw that Mither sent tae me.

Oh I love the tiny kickshaw, and I smack my lips wi' glee,
Aye mickle do I love the taste o' sic a luxourie,
But maist I love the lovin' hands that could the giftie gie
O' the tiny little kickshaw that Mither sent tae me."

Joey was a rare listener, his face had a sparkle in concentration seldom seen. It was an inspiration to the retailer. Wherever this is found, to my notion, it gives to a face an unusual distinction and charm. As I finished he drew a deep breath.

"Mothers gives kickshaws to their girls and boys 'most always, I 'spose," he murmured questioningly. His eyes were wistful, and hurt me in a strange way.

"Almost always, I think, Joey."

I smiled at him, and he smiled back bravely.

"I'm your boy—almost really and truly your boy—ain't I, Mr. David?"

I nodded.

"Pooh," he said with a swagger, "I'd liever be your boy than—than anything! You give me

kickshaws and make me magpie cages, and—and flutes and bow-guns, and you builded me a bed—"

He broke off suddenly, and without seeming to look at him I saw that his eyes were tear filled, and that he was winking fast and furiously to keep the drops from falling.

"Now then," I said, speaking somewhat huskily, "I shall give you 'Nine Little Goblins.' " Clearing my throat I began:

"They all climbed up on a high board fence,
Nine little goblins with green-glass eyes—
Nine little goblins who had no sense
And couldn't tell coppers from cold mince pies."

I finished the poem and went on to "Tentoleena," saying:

"I think Mr. Riley has intended this a bit more for girls than for boys, however, we love its tinkle, don't we, Joey?"

"Up in Tentoleena Land—
Tentoleena! Tentoleena!
All the dollies, hand in hand,
Mina, Nainie, and Serena,
Dance the Fairy fancy dances,
With glad songs and starry glances."

"If I was a girl—and had a doll—I'd never let

her get up alone at Moon-dawn and go out and wash her face in those great big dew-drops with cream on 'em. Why—she might get drownded! I wouldn't call her Christine Braibry, anyway—" Joey delivered himself of this ultimatum quite in his usual manner. And feeling somewhat relieved I inquired:

"What name would you choose, boy—Wanza or—"

"Not Wanza—no girl's name! I wouldn't have a girl-doll! I'd fix it up in pants and call it Mr. David."

After supper that evening I asked Wanza to come to the workshop with Joey and me. She gave me a laughing glance as I held open the kitchen door for her, and stood teetering in indecision at the sink with Joey clinging to her skirt.

"There are the dishes to be washed, and Mrs. Batterly's tea to be carried to her, and the milk pans to scald, and—"

"Wanza," Joey cried, "you must come! It's a surprise."

She danced across the room, tossed her apron on to a chair, and rolled down her sleeves. Her eyes glowed suddenly black with excitement, her red lips quirked at the corners. She tossed her

head, and all her snarled mop of hair writhed and undulated about her spirited face. She sprang outside with the lightness of a kitten followed by Joey, and I closed the door carefully at Mrs. Olds' instigation, and followed her to the yew path.

The heavy-blossomed service bushes hedged the path like a flowered wall, silver shadows lay around us, but through the fretwork of tree-branches we saw a mauve twilight settling down over the valley. The river was a twisting purple cord. In the violet sky a half-lit crescent moon was swimming like a fairy canoe afloat on a mythical sea. All objects were soft to the sight —thin and shadowy. The spike-like leaves above our heads glistened ghostily, the trunks of trees bulked like curling ominous shapes in the vista before us. Puffs of wind caused the maples to make faint, pattering under-breaths of sound.

We stood on the miniature bridge for a moment. The reeds were shooting up in the bed of the spring; and as we stood on the bridge they were almost waist high about us. A tule wren flew from among them, perched on a nearby cottonwood, and gave a series of short wild notes for our edification. It flirted about on its perch, with many a bob and twitch as we watched it, ap-

parently scolding at us for daring to approach so close to its habitat.

And we stood there in the musical, colorful twilight, my thoughts flew to Haidee, and I asked Wanza how she was faring.

"Well enough," she retorted, with a swift back flinging of her blonde head.

"Well enough means very well, does it, Wanza?"

"If you can't make me out, Mr. Dale, I guess I better quit talking. Seems like you never used to have no trouble."

"I believe I am growing obtuse," I replied lightly. And led the way across the bridge to the shop without further ado.

Had I dreamed that Wanza would have been so affected by the simple gift I tendered, I doubt if I would have had sufficient temerity to present it to her. I did this with a flourish, saying:

"You have been so kind to Joey and me, Wanza, that we beg you to accept this little kickshaw case in token of our appreciation. Joey hunted out the finest specimens of spirea for me, and I carved the lid, as you see, and cut your initials here in the corner."

Ah, the light in the brilliant deep blue eyes raised to mine! the smile on the tender lips, the

sobbing breath with which she spoke. I was stirred and vaguely abashed.

"You did this for me—for me," she repeated, laughing, and shaking her head, and all but weeping. She clasped the box close to her girlish breast with a huddling movement of her arms, sank her chin upon it, caressed the smooth wood with her cheek. "It's beautiful, beautiful! Oh, thank you, Mr. Dale, thank you!" Joey was cuddling against her shoulder and she put her arm out after a moment, took him into her embrace and kissed him with a soft lingering pressure of her lips against his.

When she stood upright at length her face was wreathed in smiles, and though I spied a tear on her lashes, it was with a ringing laugh that she said:

"I know what a box is, and I guess I know a case when I see it, but you'll have to tell me what a kickshaw is, Mr. Dale."

I laughed heartily. And then Joey would have me recite Riley's delicious little rhyme. The evening ended pleasantly for us all. But it left me with food for musing. Yes, I said to myself, Wanza was kind—she had ever been kind to Joey and me. Had I been too cavalier in my treatment of her? Remembering her sudden

softening, her appreciation of my small gift, I decided this was so. In future, I assured myself, I would show her every consideration. Wanza was growing up. She was no child to be hectored, and bantered, cajoled and then neglected. No! My treatment of her must be uniformly courteous hereafter.

CHAPTER XII

IN SHOP AND DINGLE

IT seemed to me during the next few days that Wanza bloomed magically; as she worked she chirruped, her feet were light, a bird seemed to sing in her breast. I knew not to what to attribute the change. She was still the debonair girl, but she was wholly woman; and she was vital as a spirit, beautiful as a flower. We grew vastly companionable.

We walked together along the flowery riverways in the twilight; at night we watched the ribbons of clouds tangle into pearly folds across the moon's face, and the stars grow bright in the purple urn of heaven. Mornings we climbed the heights and gathered wild strawberries for Haidee's luncheon, and often in the late afternoon Wanza would come to the shop and I would help her with her studies.

It was pleasant, too, to take the glasses, and penetrate deep into the heart of the greenwood and sit immovable among the shrubbery, bird-

spying, as Joey called it. It was Wanza's delight to see me stand perfectly still in a certain spot near the shop, where a bed of fragrant old-fashioned pinks frequently absorbed my attention, and wait for the sparrows and nuthatches that often came to alight on my head. Inside my shop I was tending a young cedar waxwing that had dropped at my feet from a cherry tree near the cabin one morning. Joey had given the bird assiduous attention, and was overjoyed when a few days later he found it friendly enough to sit on his hand. We named the bird, Silly Cedar. And I made him a roomy cage of slender cedar sticks. He seldom inhabited the cage, however, choosing rather to flutter freely about the workshop.

Wanza's joy in the birds was a pleasure to witness. I was at my work bench one morning, when chancing to glance through the open window I saw a charming picture. The girl stood by the bed of clove pinks, a veritable pink and white Dresden shepherdess in one of the stiffest, most immaculate of her cotton frocks, her hair an unbound, pale-flaming banner about her shoulders. On her head was poised a nuthatch.

It was the expression of her face that captivated me,—smiling, rapt, almost prayerful, as if

invoking the spirit of all aerial things. Both arms were out as though she were balancing the dainty object that perched so delicately upon her head. In every fibre she appeared electrified, as though about to soar with the birds. Again I had that sensation of glimpsing beneath the girl's casual self and finding a transfigured being.

The bird fluttered away as I gazed, Wanza stooped, gathering the flowers, and I went out to her.

She flirted the pinks beneath her chin as she looked up at me.

"I've been up since five," she laughed. Even her laugh was subdued.

"And what have you been doing since five?" I asked idly.

She opened a box that lay on the grass at her side.

"I've been up on Nigger Head after these. I saw them yesterday when I went to old Lundquist's to take him a bit of cottage cheese I'd made. See!"

I looked as she bade me. Within the box were some fine specimens of ferns and swamp laurel, and a rare white blossom that I had never seen in western woods. An airy, dainty, frosty-white, tiny star-flower.

"They are for you. I heard you wishing for swamp laurel."

"You are very, very kind, Wanza," I replied.

I lifted the laurel, but my eyes were on the white flower, and my heart was over charged, and as I looked a blur crossed my vision and I could not see the waxen petals. But I saw another woods, lush and sweet, hard by a southern homestead, I heard the darkies singing in the fields adjoining, and the sound of the river running between red clay banks. I saw my mother's smile.

I felt weak at that moment. I needed to grip hard a friendly hand. "Nothing, not God, is greater to one than one's self is, and whoever walks a furlong without sympathy walks to his own funeral drest in his shroud." Walt Whitman spoke truly. Someway I knew that Wanza's sympathy was true and exquisite, that her understanding was profound. I had never before thought of this, but suddenly I knew that it was so. She tendered me the little white flower on her open palm, and I reached out and took it and I took her hand, saying:

"You are a good girl, Wanza Lyttle."

My tongue was ineffectual to say what I would have said, and so I said nothing. The white of

her face crimsoned as I held her hand. Her blue eyes said a thousand things I could not sense. But her lips merely murmured, "What is the swamp laurel for, Mr. Dale?"

"I want to make a design of laurel for a tray I intend to carve. You see, Wanza, I am beginning already to think of the holiday trade. At Christmas I shall send some of my work to the city to an art store there."

We passed on to the workshop, and presently Joey joined us there.

"It seems to me, Mr. David," he said as he entered, "that to-day is yesterday."

I smiled at him appreciatively. I had come to call Joey my philosopher in knee breeches. He resumed, puffing out his cheeks in his characteristic way, " 'Cause I been so busy. I guess if a body was busy enough there wouldn't be no time."

"We make our own limitations, Joey," I said, bending over my cedar chest that was all but finished. "The Now is the principal thing, boy."

"Mrs. Olds is the queerest lady," he went on, "always watching the clock. An' she don't like our ways, Mr. David—she said so! She says we're slip-shod. Hit and miss, she says, that's the way we live. My, she's funny! At night

she says, 'Well, I'm glad this day is over,' an' in the morning she says, 'Dear me! I thought it would never come morning! I'm glad the night is gone.' I said to her—I said to her—" Joey paused, having used up his breath, and requiring a fresh supply.

"Go slowly," I advised. "What did you say, Joey? Get a good breath and tell Wanza and me."

"I said: 'How can you hate both times? It keeps you busy hating, don't it?' An' if you're busy hating, Mr. David, what time do you get to feed the birds, an' watch the squirrels, an' make burr baskets and cedar chests, an' bow guns and flutes?"

Joey put his head on one side and looked up at me inquiringly out of his bright shrewd eyes.

"Not much time, I'm afraid, Joey," I responded, knowing that he expected a reply."

"Of course not. Come here, Silly Cedar," he called softly to the Waxwing. He gave a musical whistling note, and the bird, that was perched on the work bench, flew to him and alighted on his outstretched hand. He made a picture that I was to remember in other sadder days, standing thus, holding the bird, scarce moving, so great was his ecstasy.

Very soon after this the chair reached completion. Upholstered in burlap and stuffed with moss, it stood in the small rustic pergola outside the cedar room, awaiting Haidee. Joey's hassock rested beside it. And at last one day after I had worked myself into a state of fine frenzy at the delay I was told that she was sitting in state in the new chair awaiting me. I hurried to the Dingle, parted the underbrush, and stood gazing at my wonder woman before she was aware of my coming.

She sat leaning back in the big chair. She looked very weary and pale as she reclined there. The rough silk of her robe was blue—the rare blue sometimes seen in paintings of old Madonnas. Her lovely throat was bare. Her creamy hands with their pink-tinted nails lay idly clasped in her lap; and her feet, resting on Joey's hassock, were shod in strange Oriental flat-heeled slippers with big drunken-looking rosettes on the toes.

"You are quite recovered?" I asked, stepping forward.

"Oh, Mr. Dale!" she cried, and seemed unable to proceed. And I found myself bending above her with both of her hands in mine, looking down into her shadowy, mysterious eyes.

I summoned my voice at last, and spoke rather indistinctly: "Joey and I have been awaiting your convalescence impatiently. Joey has been very anxious about his Bell Brandon, as he calls you."

She still sat with her hands in mine, and she looked up at me with a strangely quiet gaze and replied gravely: "I like Joey's name for me. Does he really call me that?"

"Why," I said, "I have even ventured to call you so in mentioning you to Joey."

I released her hands and seated myself on the steps below her. There was a silence. The sun slipped behind a cloud. The shadows in the Dingle deepened to invisible green velvet. In the perfume and hush I could hear my heart beat. It was very still. A cat-bird called from the thicket, the hum of bees buzzing among the clover in the meadow came to us with a sabbath sound.

Haidee looked at me and smiled. "It is very restful here. How is your other patient progressing?"

"Very well, I believe."

"This is a splendid sanatorium. I had some wonderful dreams in that cedar room."

"I should like to hear about them. I am

curious to know what dreams the room induced," I answered, with rather too much impressment, I'm afraid.

She leaned her head against the burlapped chair-back and lowered her lashes against her cheek. I studied her face. During her illness she seemed to have undergone a subtle transformation. There were lines about her drooping eyes, something cold and almost austere in the expression of her face that I had not noticed before. She seemed farther from me than she had yet seemed—immeasurably remote.

"The dreams were very good dreams—restful dreams."

"Yes," I said gently.

"They were dreams of homey things—simple, plain things—and yet there was a zest in them—a repose—a complete forgetfulness."

"Forgetfulness?"

"Yes. Isn't forgetfulness the Nirvana of the Hindu? If we remember we may regret. If we have no thought backward or forward, we are blissfully quiescent."

I watched a yellow warbler preening itself on a swinging bough of a tamarack. "It is easier to have no thought forward—perhaps," I said slowly after a pause.

"You think so, too? I am sure of it. The past is an insistent thing—a ghoulish thing—waving shrouded arms over the present. To forget!—ah, there's the rub."

She spoke precipitately, turning her head restlessly this way and that on the rough cushion. The line of her throat, the tiny fluffy ringlets at the roots of her hair, the curve of her lovely cheek, stirred my blood strangely.

"Tell me something more of yourself," I blurted out abruptly.

She started. Her eyes grew bleak, worn with memories, it seemed; her face that had shone warmly pale, changed and stiffened to marble. She answered in a cold, slight voice: "There is so little to tell." After awhile she added: "Perhaps some day you will tell me your story."

I sat and watched the yellow warbler, reflecting on the strange relief it would be to recite to sympathetic ears my pent-up dreary tale, my baleful tale of a scourging past, of present loneliness and hard plain living. It was the sort of tale that is never told—unless the teller be a driveller. I laughed cheerlessly, and someway the brightness of the hour was clouded by the phantom of the past that Haidee's words had

invoked. And the phantom dared to stand even at the gate of the future and demand toll, so that neither past, present nor future was a thing to rejoice in.

My face must have grown grim. I clenched and unclenched my hand on my knee. Haidee's voice continued: "But in the meantime you don't know me—the real every day me—and I don't know you—the real you; and it's interesting, rather, to speak to each other, like sliding wraith-like ships that pass to opposite ports. We fling our voices out—then darkness again—and a silence."

"I am what I am," I answered quickly.

She nodded concurrence. "Dear me! Of course. But you were not always what you are now. That's the point. And, some day, I shall persuade you to tell me all."

I answered pointedly: "In the words of Olivia, 'you might do much.' "

She laughed oddly, almost amusedly, at my vehemence, and swayed back a little from me as I held out my hand. "Good-bye," I said, "for to-day." And when she yielded me her hand I pressed it lightly and let it go.

I had never tried, until that moment, to analyze

the quality of my sentiment for Haidee. I had been filled with a vague romantic idealism where my wonder woman was concerned, but suddenly I was restless, and dissatisfied with idealising. I wanted to know Judith Batterly—the real woman. I wanted to pierce the veil of mysticism in which she was wrapped. I was not content with the artificiality of our discourse. It seemed to me I failed to strike a note truly sound in any of our talks. The real woman eluded me. I could not bring Haidee down to my plane from the dream-world where only she seemed to function. She was ever remote. And I wanted to understand fully my feeling for her.

When I fell asleep that night, dreams of Haidee and Wanza were commingled. Once I awoke, dressed completely, and walked outside the workshop in the clear, balmy air of the night. I lay down on the river bank and watched a particularly big bright star that hung just over the crest of Nigger Head. I thought of Wanza—of her new and gentler ways that were replacing the old crisp brightness of demeanor—and I smiled. I thought of Haidee—and I sighed. Then my thoughts flew to the kickshaw case I had given Wanza and her reception of it, and to the swamp laurel she had risen at daybreak to

gather for me, and thinking of these things I went back to the workshop and crept in beside Joey, and with my arm about the lad slept dreamlessly till morning.

CHAPTER XIII

DEFICIENCIES

ABOUT this time I wrote in my diary: "A man in love is an oaf. How awkward and lumbering he is in the presence of his Dulcinea. How undesirable and like a clod away from her. He is a churl to every one but the one woman. I have been out in the sun-splashed forest searching for rare specimens of the wood anemone for my wonder woman. My search absorbed my morning, and I quite forgot that I had promised Wanza to ride to town for flour for the weekly baking. I dreamed and mused the hours away among the basaltic boulders in a strange grove of twisted yews, where nereid green pools lie in little hollows and maiden hair springs up through the gold-brown moss carpet. This grove has long been a favorite of mine. It has a classical aspect; there is something about it that suggests a train of mythological conceptions. I feel sure that the great God Pan must be fashioning his flute

among the rushes in the bed of the spring. In the wind's sibilance I hear the skirl of the Pandean pipes. I recall the divine huntress, and summon up visions of Iris, the goddess of many colors.

This morning the wood spaces were filled with visions of Haidee. She smiled at me from behind the clumps of bracken and huckleberry, her eyes beamed at me from the hearts of the flowers. The clouds were her garments, the blue sky her soul. As Dante walked dreaming of Beatrice so went I with Haidee ever before me.

Love is a rejuvenating precious thing. Even a hopeless love softens the fibres of one's entire being, and straightens the warped soul of one. But I must not reach out toward Love! I must renounce. I must go on alone, like a battered, wrecked, drifting derelict. I have thought the blackest part of my life behind me. I have come to look forward too much. I have vented my heavy heart, and found solace in work and books. And now! I must live through the culminating sorrow. Is all my life to be one great renunciation? I find myself rebelling. I have been too much the helpless victim of circumstances. For me Ossa has been heaped on Pelion.

I have said, "If I can but avoid comparing my

lot with what it might have been, I can be a man." I have repeated: "I swear the earth shall surely be complete to him or her who shall be complete. The earth remains jagged and broken only to him or her who remains jagged and broken." I have said all this to myself times innumerable. And now what shall I say to myself? I can scarcely whisper to myself, "Courage!" I am baffled, balked, stunned. Oh, what do I signify in the scheme of things! I am a bit of washed spindrift. Glad should I be to surrender the quick of being. If it were not for work!—Through labor only I come near to God, the master artizan, who labors tirelessly and marvelously.

After making this entry in my diary I gained an unexpected surcease from wearied thoughts. I went on with my life calmly enough, doing the things nearest to hand, eating three good meals a day as a man will, writing on my novel evenings, and sleeping normally, with Joey curled into a warm little ball at my side. In some strange way after my descent into Avernus I became tranquil in every pulse. After brooding over much I sat back, figuratively speaking, and thought of nothing, but the simple joy of being. Sunlight was pure gold, the dew silver, each twilight a

benediction, each dawn a natal hymn. I managed so that I saw very little of Haidee, paying my respects to her once a day, and pleading work as an excuse if invited to linger in the shady Dingle where she sat with her work or a book. I contemplated sending Joey to school in the autumn, and a portion of each day I devoted to teaching the small lad spelling. His remarks concerning the rite were often pungent. He persevered to please me, but I could see that in his heart he pitied me for my zealous attempts on his behalf.

"When people can say things what's the use of spelling?" he asked one day. He held his book upside down, his eyes fixed longingly on a skimming prismatic cloud of butterflies beyond the workshop door. "I can say God—what's the good of spelling it?" I did not respond, and evidently anxious to convince me further, he added: "Yes. And one time once—oh, when I was teenty, Mr. David, I thought I saw him."

"Do you think now that you saw him, Joey?" I questioned, half smiling.

"Well," he replied slowly, as if pondering the matter, "I was sure then, Mr. David."

"Where did you see the—er—person whom you believed to be God?" I asked.

"In the village."

"Did he speak to you, Joey?"

Joey looked at me slyly.

"Oh, Mr. David," he whispered deprecatingly, "do you 'spose I'd 'spect him to—when I'm a worm?"

I went on with the lesson, vaguely wondering what sort of mind the lady who taught Joey at Sunday School was possessed of.

At the conclusion of the lesson, Joey observed: "Mrs. Olds says our cabin is full of de—deficiencies, Mr. David. What do de—deficiencies do?"

"Deficiencies let flies in, and permit mice to molest the flour barrel,—deficiencies make chimneys smoke, and floors creak."

"Hm! Are de—deficiencies holes, Mr. David?"

"In a sense, lad."

"Where'd be the fun, though," my loyal lad cried out, "if there weren't no holes in cabins. There'd be nothing to patch. An' you'd never see a rat poke his cunning head through the wall cold nights when you sit by the fire. Pooh! I like de—deficiencies."

That very day I went about setting what traps I had to catch the rodents that were destroying

Mrs. Olds' peace of mind. And I began the manufacture of others. I also mended the screen doors, and purchased a package of mosquito netting from Wanza's cart, for the windows.

It was a curious ménage I captained. I found myself grinning from time to time as I took orders from Mrs. Olds. Although I was in love with Haidee, and although Joey was an entertaining companion, and although I found Mrs. Olds' pessimism a curious study, it was to Wanza that I turned most frequently for comfort and advice during these trying days. We had many a rueful laugh together at Mrs. Olds' expense.

"The whole thing with her, I do think," Wanza said, one day, "is drawing her pay."

But Wanza maligned her. Mrs. Olds was a rare nurse, conscientious to a fault. And she received little enough pay from the big man, I knew. Wanza had a cot in the cedar room now, and Mrs. Olds was able to rest the greater part of the night, as her patient's condition improved.

CHAPTER XIV

JACK OF ALL TRADES

IN due time I received another communication from my unknown friend. Very brief it was. It said:

"I appreciate your confidence. I am glad to know of Haidee. But I want still more to know of yourself. Can you trust me?"

I did not answer this at once, revolving it in my mind. A few days later I wrote in this wise:

"There is little to know, kind friend. Eight years ago, when I was twenty-four, I came to Idaho. I took up a homestead on the Cœur d' Alene River. I proved up on it, and I have sold all but sixteen acres. I have worked hard. I have grown horny-handed, weather-beaten and a bit gray. I live in a flannel shirt and corduroy trousers, and I eat off a pine table in the kitchen of a three-roomed shack. Lately, I have developed into a craftsman. It is a sordid enough tale—is it not?"

Conversations with Haidee were still infrequent. Wanza ordinarily shared them, and Joey was nearly always present.

We were seated in a group about the pool in

the Dingle, one morning, Haidee in her chair, Joey at her feet with Jingles asleep at his side, Wanza on the brink of the pool with her tatting, gazing in from time to time at the reflection of her pale blonde loveliness, while I, seated on a stump of a pine-tree, was carving a bow-gun for Joey.

There was a white syringa bush above Haidee that was dropping pale flowers on her head. They seemed to me like perfumed petals of Paradise. I caught one as it fell, smiling into her tranquil eyes. I said to myself that with each succeeding day Haidee's voice grew lighter, her laughter more frequent, her expression brighter.

As we sat there, an entrancing harmony arose about us. Waves of ecstatic melody swelled and softened and swelled again through the green fragrant woods. Trills on one hand, deep throaty mellow carolings on the other. The thrush, the warbler, the sparrow joined in a mighty chorus.

"What a magnificent orchestra," Haidee cried. "The birds are holding high carnival."

The pearl-like, throbbing symphony grew sweeter and sweeter. We sat spellbound drinking in the enchantment with hungry ears. Suddenly I cried:

"Look! There is a lazuli-bunting."

I pointed to the feathered blue beauty that was winging its way to a nearby maple.

"Lazuli-bunting?" Haidee echoed. "What a cosy name. I suppose the baby birds are called baby buntings, Joey."

Joey looked up in her face with adoration in his brown eyes, and she moved a little forward and pressed his head gently back against her knee. They contemplated each other with a sort of radiant satisfaction.

"No one ever told me about baby buntings," Joey declared at last.

"What a shame! Mr. Dale, do you know you have neglected Joey's education?"

Very slowly and prettily Haidee repeated the old rhyme, her fingers stroking the lad's sunburnt cheek. Wanza's eyes were very big and strangely burning as they rested on her. And her lips were drawn into a straight, unlovely red line as she finally dropped her regard to her tatting. I carved in silence, and the lazuli-bunting was forgotten as the recital of the nursery rhyme led to the demand for others.

"Wanza," I teased, going up behind her in the kitchen later, and reaching round to tickle her chin with a ribbon grass as she bent over the iron-

ing board. "Wanza, why so pensive? Where are your smiles?"

"She smiles enough for both," Wanza retorted, giving an angry flirt to the ruffle she was ironing. "I don't know which is the worst—your smiley kind or your everlasting scolds. Mrs. Olds would sour the cream—and Mrs. Batterly's eternal smirk makes me think of a sick calf. And when I feel like rushing around and biting the furniture it's just enough to kill me, so it is, to have her so purry and mealy-mouthed."

"But why should you want to rush around and bite the furniture?" I asked in bewilderment.

"Oh, just because I'm a great big rough, mean-tempered country girl! I've never had real bringing up." Tears stood in Wanza's stormy eyes. "No perfect lady ever felt like biting anything. Oh, please go away, Mr. Dale, and leave me be—I'm cross and tired—and not fit to be noticed!"

I saw Mrs. Olds smiling palely at me from the door of the sick room. She tiptoed forward.

"Hush," she whispered. "My patient is asleep. He is quite rational, Mr. Dale. In a few days he will be able to sit up."

With Mrs. Olds' permission I went in and stood at the bedside and looked down at the sleep-

ing man. He was thin and his face was lean and white. He looked a very different being from the man who had staggered into the cabin that night in the storm. He looked more nearly a man as God intended him to look. His brow was high, his jaw clean cut, his hair grew luxuriantly on his well-shaped head. But his mouth beneath the brown moustache was loose-lipped, self indulgent, and obstinate. And there was something hateful to me in the set of his thick neck on his big shoulders.

I returned to the kitchen. It was very hot in the small room, and the steam that arose from a kettle of soup on the stove as Wanza lifted the lid assailed my nose and eyes unpleasantly. I opened the door to allow the steam to escape, and Wanza spoke hastily:

"Shut the door, Mr. Dale, please, you're cooling off the oven, and I'm baking this morning."

"Does a whiff of air like that cool your oven?" I asked curiously.

"Well, I should say so. My, it's hot in here!"

I looked at her red face, and as I did so an inspiration came to me. "Wanza," I said, "why should I not make you a fireless cooker?"

She stared at me.

"Is there any reason why you would not like one?" I queried.

"Glory! I'd like one right enough."

"Come to the workshop after dinner," I rejoined, "and we will discuss it."

Wanza came to the shop later in the afternoon and I convinced her that the construction of a fireless cooker was a bagatelle to a skilled craftsman such as I considered myself to be. Her face flamed with the fire of her enthusiasm. She caught my hand, and cried:

"You're a fixing man, all right! You sure are."

I had never seen her blue eyes so softly grateful before. They were like humid flowers. Her voice was full and low. Her hand pressed my hand, and clung. Seeing her thus moved I stammered:

"Why, I seem to be a sort of Jack of all trades. A Jack of all trades is master of none, usually." Her face was very close to mine, and what with her strange witchery and her appealing wistfulness I might have said more; but as I gazed at her my senses untangled, and I locked my lips. I shook my head at her, and I smiled a little deprecatingly and loosed my hand as she murmured: "I think you're just grand—just

grand! You're kind as kind can be. Oh, Mr. David Dale, you sure are a good, good fellow!"

"All of this because I am going to try to turn out some sort of fireless cooker," I remonstrated.

"You're always trying to do something—for somebody—trying to help along—that's it. It ain't so much just this."

Wanza was rather incoherent as she turned and walked out of the shop. And someway instead of her words of commendation heartening me they left me dejected. But the cooker was a success. A stout box, lined with asbestos, a receptacle of tin, and sawdust for packing turned the trick. And the corned beef and cabbage that Wanza, the conjurer, straightway evolved from this crude contrivance left nothing to be desired.

The chicken Wanza cooked one day soon after was so unusually succulent that we decided at once to ride to the village before supper and carry Captain Grif a generous portion.

"He'll relish a bit of chicken after so much pork and corn bread, and such living. I can warm it up on the stove for him, and stir up some biscuits, while you and him are having a game of chess on the porch," Wanza announced.

Accordingly we rode away over the ploughed field together at about five o'clock, Mrs. Olds

watching us dourly from the kitchen doorway, and Joey yelling after us: "I'll see to Bell Brandon while you're away."

Captain Grif's was the warmest of welcomes.

"Well, well, well," he said, rising from his rocker on the front porch as we mounted the steps, "and here you be, the two of ye—and better than a crowd, I say! By golly, s-ship-mate, you're a sight for sore eyes. You looked peaked, too, and Wanza ain't at her best. But sit right down—Wanza, there's the hammock—the hammock I slept in many a night at sea—plump into that now."

He beamed at his daughter. It was good to see his pride and delight in her.

"Dad," Wanza said, wagging her bright head at him, "something told us you was pining for chicken—chicken with dumpling, Dad. It's in this pail. You sit here with Mr. Dale, and I'll get out the chessmen, and while you're playing I'll warm up the stew. Then when you've had your bite with us, I'll play on the melodeon—I'll play 'Bell Mahone'—and you and Mr. Dale can sit on the porch and watch the moon come up, and you can tell him stories; and pretty soon I'll come out, after I have tidied up, and go to sleep in the hammock."

It all fell out as Wanza planned. We had our bite together; I helped carry the dishes to the sink in the kitchen while Captain Grif filled his pipe; and then Wanza played on the melodeon and sang "Bell Mahone," and "Wait for the Wagon," and "Bonnie Eloise," while Captain Grif and I chatted on the porch. The moon came up later, and Wanza swung in the hammock and dozed, or pretended to, while her father told me one story after another. The central figure of many of his tales was Dockery—the ship's steward—whom he described as a bald-pated, middle-aged man, with a round face, a Mephistophelean smile, and the helpless frown of a baby. "A curious m-mixture that feller! I was some time readin' him—but I read him. He wa'n't very sharp—that was his trouble mostly. It's a trouble lots of us is afflicted with. Them as knows it I have a sort o' respect for—them as don't I 'bominate, I sure do, s-ship-mate. Ignorance itself is bad enough, but when it's mixed proper with conceit, they's no standin' it." In this wise old Grif would discourse much to our edification.

To-night he was hugely interested in dissecting the big man's character from bits concerning him Wanza and I had dropped.

"I don't take no stock in him, boy—I've told

Wanza so from the first—with all his nightshirts embroidered like an old lady's antimacassar! And when he gets to settin' up, and needs waitin' on, I want Wanza should make herself scarce. The gal tells me she thinks he is a rich man. Well, may be—may be; that don't mend matters if he's a rascal."

At this juncture Wanza yawned, tossed her arms abroad, and said sleepily:

"He's a gentleman, Dad."

Old Grif chuckled.

"Now, what do you mean by that? A gentleman! Ump! I've never knowed the time I ain't heard somebody called a gentleman that hadn't any more call to be considered a gentleman than your pap here. A gentleman, hey? you mean he has clothes made by a tailor and money in his pockets, and goes to the barber frequent, probably takes a bath every day—runnin' water in his room at home, you guess? Hum—well—yes—he's a gentleman 'cording to them standards. I got my own standard I measure men by, thank God."

In his excitement Captain Grif rose from his chair and limped back and forth on the porch, thumping his cane down hard at each step. He went on:

"Now, Dale, here—*he's* a gentleman. You bet he is. He ain't got no initial embroidered on *his* shirts—ain't got mor'n two, likely. He ain't got no runnin' water in *his* house—but he douses himself in the river every day; and he shaves himself. It's some work for *him* to get himself up presentable. Tain't no credit to a feller to keep clean when he has a shower bath in his closet." He was chuckling again, and Wanza ventured to say:

"I call him a gentleman because—he's different—that's what he is. He don't talk or look or act like any one in these parts. I like him. I think I could earn a bit amusing him when he is able to sit up, Dad."

"You'll march right back home here if I hear of your tryin' it, gal, mark me, now!"

"But, Dad, you're not fair! Why, he may be the best man living. You haven't ever laid your eyes on him."

"I knows it—I knows it, Wanza. I may sound a leetle mite prejudiced; but I ain't—oh, no! I'm fair-minded; but I'm a reader of character, and I can tell as much by a man's nightshirts as some of these here phrenologists can tell by the bumps on his head. The minute you said he had flowers and initials worked on his night-

shirts that minute I said to myself, 'He ain't no good'; and you mark my words, he ain't."

Going home, Wanza said to me:

"Poor Dad, he's terribly suspicious, ain't he, Mr. Dale?"

"A little, Wanza, perhaps."

"You're suspicious, too, David Dale. You don't think the big man is a gentleman."

I considered.

"I think he would be called a gentleman, Wanza."

She tossed her head.

"I do think he's the handsomest man—and the smartest man, seems! And I like embroidered underclothes. So there!"

CHAPTER XV

I BEGIN TO WONDER ABOUT WANZA

SOMETIMES I grew perverse, and went about the tedious common round of my tread-mill existence doggedly, taking umbrage at Mrs. Olds for the many unnecessary, trivial services she exacted. She seemed to delight in keeping my neck under the yoke. There was always a door sagging on its hinges, a knife that needed a new handle, a lamp or two that she or Wanza had forgotten to fill. The mice that I took from the traps each morning were legion. They were Mrs. Olds' favorite topic of conversation at breakfast time. How one small cabin could harbor so fierce and vast a horde I could scarce conceive. I believe I half suspected Mrs. Olds of emulating the pied piper, and rounding them up from the fields and woods. I was appointed custodian of the wood-rats' traps, as well. These were taken alive; and one morning I slyly let one escape beneath my tormentor's chair. Jingles saved the situation by pouncing on the

rodent and snapping his teeth together on its neck. I came to have small appetite for breakfast.

I began each day by carrying water from the spring to fill the barrel outside the kitchen door. Mrs. Olds was apt to mount guard over the barrel during this period, to see that no earwigs or bits of leaves went into it from the pail. She was very particular to have the barrel kept sweet and clean, and every second day I scrubbed and rinsed the inside. She required very fine wood for the kitchen stove for quick fires when she desired to heat her patient's food; and for the fireplace in the front room she asked me to select other wood than cedar, cedar being prone to crackle and snap. I was well nigh staggered with the knowledge of how a woman's housekeeping differs from a man's. Joey and I had felt no lack in the good old days. I smiled to see my lad's eyes open widely at Mrs. Olds' occasional reference to our "pitiful attempts at housekeeping."

"Are our housekeeping pitiful?" he invariably asked me later.

But though I swallowed my rising gorge, and managed to work under Mrs. Olds' coercion, there was ample time left in which to labor at the simple tasks I loved.

Joey and I had discovered that a pair of martins were nesting in a hollow tree near the cabin, and in order to induce other pairs to pass the summer with us I had decided to erect a few bird houses on the premises. I was in the Dingle one evening, therefore, in the act of hoisting a martin house on a cedar pole, when Joey came through the elder bushes with his inquisitive small face in a pucker.

"Mrs. Olds says birds don't like bird houses," he hazarded.

"Indeed?" I murmured.

"Do they, Mr. David?"

"I think so, lad."

"She says she guesses p'haps martins do, mor'n other birds. Why do martins like bird houses 'specially, Mr. David?"

"Why, lad," I replied, straightening, and taking my pipe from between my lips, "I think it is because the Indians, long ago, before the white man's time, made snug houses for the martins out of bark and fastened them to their tent poles; and accordingly the martins have grown friendly, and they like us to be hospitable and prepare a home for them."

"I don't like to have to coax them," Joey decided. "You're awful good to things, Mr. David

—sometimes when you coax me, I know I'd ought to get whipped instead."

It was the purple gloaming of an unusually sultry day; and as Joey finished, I looked at my watch.

"Bed-time, boy," I announced.

"Hoo—hoo! Hoo—hoo!" he called suddenly, throwing back his head. His eyes went to the windows of the cedar room. Soon a faint answering "Hoo—hoo!" resounded. He sprang up the steps, and grew hesitant before the closed door. But in another moment it swung open and Haidee appeared. She put her arms about the boyish visitant.

"I'll kiss you on each eyelid," I heard her say. "That means happy dreams. Go to sleep and dream of 'Mina, Nainie, and Serena'—oh, I forgot! They are for little girls' dreams. What shall I tell you to dream of?"

"P'r'aps I'll dream of 'Dwainies' and 'Winnowelvers'—what lives in Spirkland—an' all them things you telled me about, shall I?" Joey responded chivalrously.

"I think it would be very lovely if you would," Haidee's tender tones replied. And then the kiss was given—a kiss "like the drip of a drop of dew."

I heard Joey's abashed, "Good night—good night, Bell Brandon." Then he beat a hasty crashing retreat through the underbrush, and my wonder woman came down the steps and stood at my side.

"What a glorious sky!" she exclaimed. "Soon there'll be a trail of star dust across that mauve vastness up yonder. I wish I might go down to the river and see the reflections."

There was a wistful young note in her voice.

"Nothing easier," I assured her. "You seem quite at home on your crutches. I think we can manage."

And so it happened that we watched the sun set together, sitting side by side on the green plush river bank. It was a gorgeous setting, and a more gorgeous afterglow. The meadows across the river were like a wavy robe of pink silk. The stars crept out and floated low like skimming butterflies. The river was amber and gold. Haidee wore the blue robe that I found so distracting. As she talked, from time to time, she turned her head and gazed, pensive-eyed, across the water, and I saw the black loop of her hair, the line of cheek and throat that moved me to such profound rapture. I sat there awkward and tongue-tied while she told me that old Lund-

quist and a couple of hands from the village had begun repairs at Hidden Lake.

"I have enjoyed your hospitality," she said earnestly, "but I must go as soon as the cabin is in condition. Wanza will go with me. You are hospitable even to the birds," she finished smilingly. "I think you must have Finnish ancestry."

"My people are Southerners," I answered, scarcely thinking of my words.

"How interesting. Did you live in the South?"

"Yes."

"Oh! Shall you return some day?"

I shrank from her open look. I answered, "No," quietly.

Her black-tressed head dipped forward on her chest and her lips grew mute as if my quick denial had silenced them. After a long while she said:

"What grand horizons you have in the West. I grow happier with each sunset that I see. Look at that fleet of pinkish cloudlets—those cloud-chariots of fire racing in those pearly streets."

"The South cannot compare with the West," I said. "Could any one describe this valley? Only a poet could do it. The summers here!—

crisp, cool nights for sleep, clear bracing days for work—"

"And what for relaxation?"

"What do you think?"

"The twilights for relaxation, surely. The twilights—purple and mysterious. See those weird trees that leap like twisting flames into the sky. Look at the river, lovingly clasped in mountain arms. Listen to the bird-twitterings. Mr. Dale, what is the bird that sings far into the night?"

"The bird that says: 'Sweet, sweet, please hark to me, won't you?' "

She laughed. "Something equally plaintive, at any rate."

"It's the white-crowned sparrow. You'll hear it through the darkest nights. Its song has all the sombre quality of the dark hours. It's our American nightingale."

"Mr. Audubon. You know tomes of bird lore, don't you? Joey says you are writing a nature story. I didn't know the sparrows sang like nightingales before."

I smiled down into the engaging face, and then I threw back my head and whistled. I began with a rich bell-clear note, this merged into a well defined melody, and terminated in a pealing

chanson. "The meadow lark," I said, "which is not a lark at all, but belongs to the oriole family. It is an incessant singer."

"Joey said you whistled like the birds. Why, you're a wonder! A craftsman—a fixing man—and—a bird boy."

"A bird in the heart is worth more than a hundred in the note book," I quoted.

The evening ended all too soon.

Two days later Joey brought me the information that Haidee was walking about in the Dingle with the aid of a single crutch.

"An' she could easily go without that, she says, Mr. David. An' she says soon she can send them to the children's hospital in the city."

"Give Bell Brandon my congratulations," I bade Joey as I rode away.

I had been to the cabin on Hidden Lake but once since the accident to my wonder woman. I had gone there the following day to fetch Haidee's mare. Wanza had gone with me and had brought away a few essential articles of clothing for her employer.

On my arrival I found that old Lundquist and the village hands had cleared away the debris, and that the work of restoring the lean-to was well under way.

I made a rough draft of the improvements Haidee and I had planned for the cabin, and drew up some specifications for the men, and then I strolled down to the lake. I was saying to myself that the cabin should be tight and sound for the fall rains, and that if Haidee would allow me I would further embellish it with a back porch and a rustic pergola like the one I had built for Joey at Cedar Dale, when I heard a splash in the water, a sudden swishing sound in the rushes, and saw a movement in the tules. I sprang to the water's edge. Soon a canoe emerged from the green thickets.

Wanza sat in the canoe, plying the paddle. A triumphant light was on her face, her hands shone bronze in the sun, her red lips smiled mischievously. She called to me:

"I've run away! I had to get out on the river, I just had to! Mr. Dale, do you hear the yellowthroat singing 'witchery—witchery—witchery'?"

I straightened my shoulders with a quick uplift of spirit. Her unexpected presence set my pulses beating a livelier measure. Her cornflower blue eyes rested on me, then wandered to the birch thickets along the shore, and she sat leaning slightly forward, her gaze remote, a charming figure in the sunlight.

"Would you like to hear me recite my little piece about the yellow-throat?"

> "While May bedecks the naked trees
> With tassels and embroideries,
> And many blue-eyed violets beam
> Along the edges of the stream,
> I hear a voice that seems to say,
> Now near at hand, now far away,
> 'Witchery—witchery—witchery.' "

Her glance came back to me.

"I wish, Mr. Dale, that we had blue violets in these woods—they all seem to be yellow. Why do you stare at me so?"

"I had no idea you were coming; it is a stare of surprise."

"But you're glad to see me, now, aren't you? I'll paddle you home. How's the cabin getting on?"

"It is scarcely habitable yet. But I think the men are getting on as well as could be expected."

Her face was dappled with light and shadow as she sat there. An exquisite, happy radiance emanated from her. She looked inquiringly into my eyes and swept her paddle.

"You *are* surprised to see me, you sure are! But now that I am here I want to see the im-

provements. Give me your hand, David Dale."

She beached her canoe, stood up, and placed her hand on my shoulder as I bent to her. Very lightly I passed my arm about her. She flashed a laughing side glance at me, and put one foot over the side of the craft. "I don't need that much help," she said, grimacing.

The canoe rocked, suddenly. She stumbled. I caught her. She was against my breast. "You see you needed that much help," I laughed boyishly.

"Let me go, Mr. David Dale."

She shook herself free and stood apart from me. The sunlight slanted on her face as she stood there, flushing wildly, gilded her white neck, flashed on her bare arms. She held her head down for a moment, and then she raised it and looked at me. Her eyes were soft and wet. "What a goose I was," she cried softly. "Come on, I'll race you to the cabin!"

I paddled home in the canoe with Wanza, after directing Lundquist to ride my horse back to Cedar Dale. The river purred to us all the way, the meadow larks and warblers chanted roundelays of joy and love from the thickets, and the birch trees shook their silver, tinkling leaves in elfish music above the sun-kissed water. We

were very silent drifting down the river, and my thoughts were strange, strange thoughts. I had begun to wonder about Wanza—Wanza, who understood my rapture at the sight of the new day, who felt the same tightening of the throat at the song of the birds, the same breathlessness beneath the stars. I had begun to ask myself if, after all, she were not as fine as another, even though through long association her rareness for me was impaired.

CHAPTER XVI

WE HAVE AN ADVENTURE

ABOUT this time I began to hear strange stories in the village of a silver-tip bear that was committing grave depredations in the community. I recounted exploits of grizzlies to Haidee and Wanza as we sat in the Dingle now and then, smiling at Haidee's delicate shiver of horror, and glorying in Wanza's bravado which led her into all sorts of bombastic declarations as to what her line of conduct would be should she meet Mr. Silvertip face to face.

"Of course," she was fond of repeating, "if I was carrying a gun I would shoot him."

Joey kept me awake long after we both should have been soundly sleeping to tell me how he would meet the bear in the woods some fine day when alone, and summarily dispose of him with the twenty-two calibre rifle he called his own, but which needless to say, he had never been allowed to use much. We were all pleasantly excited anent the grizzly.

"I feel sure that it will be my happy fortune to fire the shot that will bring to an inglorious end old big foot's career," I said dramatically one morning.

We had foregathered in the Dingle—Haidee's mare, Buttons, and Wanza's Rosebud were neighing just beyond in the pine thicket—for we were going to ride. Some days since we had taken our first jaunt on horseback, and Haidee had found that the excursion wearied her not at all. The crutches were infrequently used now. Haidee explained that her continued use of them was simply a manifestation of fear-thought. I little meant the words I said, but when we rode away I carried my thirty-thirty slung on my shoulder.

As we went through the village we met Captain Grif Lyttle mounted on his piebald broncho. It required no little urging to induce him to join our expedition. But eventually he was won over.

"If it was goin' to ride only, I'd be for it. But I see you're toting your dinner. I don't hold with picnics. This carryin' grub a few miles—an' there be *nothin'* heavier than grub—settin' down and eatin' it, and beatin' it back home, is all tomfoolishness, 'pears to me. But you young folks sees things different; and if so be I'll be

any acquisition whatsoever to your party, I stand ready to go along." He looked hard at Haidee as he spoke, and I was half prepared for the remark he addressed to her: " 'Pears to me, young lady, you ain't got up for a picnic, exactly. That there gauzy waist'll snag on the bushes, and your arms'll burn to a blister—there's no protection in such sleazy stuff. Look at Wanza now—she's rigged up proper!—stout skirt and high shoes and a right thick waist."

We had gone some distance before I noticed that Wanza was carrying my twenty-two. I was not over civil when I saw it in her hands.

"I like to shoot things," she explained, with a deprecatory glance.

Captain Grif chuckled.

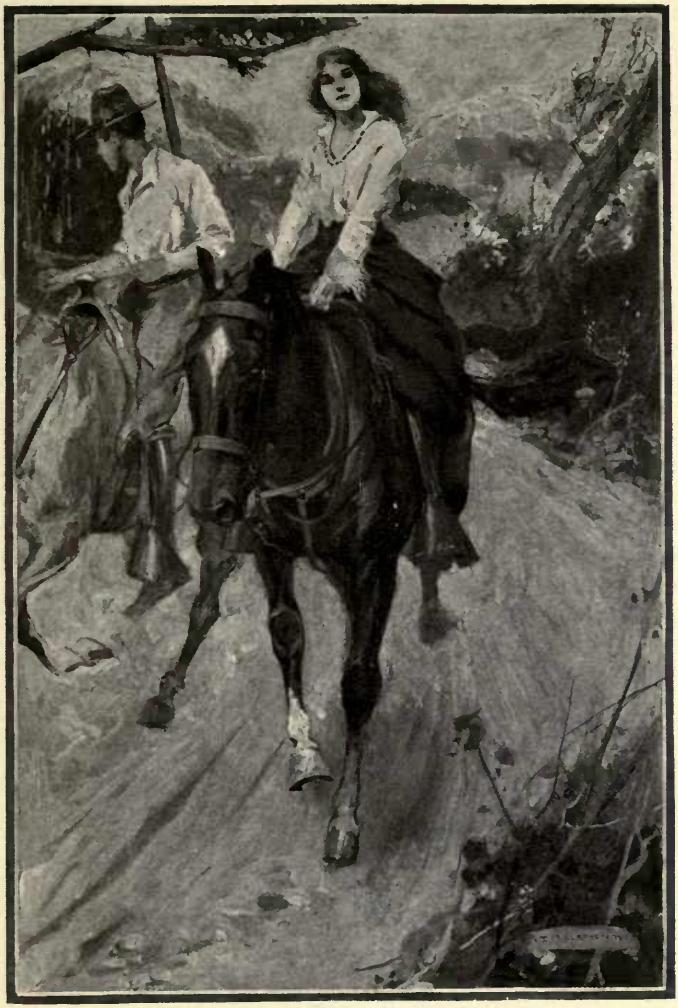
"Wanza do be the beatenest gal with a gun, if I do say it," he remarked.

The glance he leveled at his daughter was pleased and proud; and there was a depth of affection in it that was touching.

"Well," Wanza repeated lightly, "I sure do like to shoot things."

"Things!—squirrels, rabbits, birds—what?" I winked at Captain Grif.

"You know me better than that!" she stormed.



A SUDDEN YEARNING SPRANG UP

"What then?"

"Well—the bear, if I meet him alone."

"With a twenty-two!"

I turned my back on her and spurred forward to Haidee's side. Haidee sat her mount superbly. She wore the blue riding skirt and white blouse she had worn on the occasion of her first visit to Cedar Dale. She was hatless. Her hair was loosely braided. She swayed lightly in her saddle. There was something bonny, almost insouciant in her bearing this morning. Wanza rode beside her father with Joey on the saddle before her, and they lagged behind Haidee and me persistently, stopping so often that once or twice we lost sight of them completely when the road curved or we dipped down into a hollow. Whenever I glanced around at Wanza I saw her riding with her face upturned to the trees, a detached look on her face. Once I heard her whistle to a blue bird and once I heard her sing. The pathos of her song clutched me by the throat. In the midst of a speech to Haidee I stopped short. In my heart a sudden yearning sprang up, a yearning only half understood; I longed to help, to lift Wanza—to make her more like the woman at my side—more finished, less elemental. In spite of

my wonder and worship of Haidee the pathos of Wanza's simple, ignorant life stirred me—yes, and hurt me!

Nevertheless I was still facetious to Wanza when we dismounted beneath the shade of some giant pines at noon. She winced as she unslung the rifle from her shoulder, and I said teasingly:

"I thought you'd feel the weight of that by noon."

Haidee murmured: "You poor thing! Why did you insist on bringing it?"

I looked across at her sharply. Something in her manner of speaking caused me to say chivalrously: "Wanza is welcome to the rifle—it isn't that."

With a quick glance from one to the other Wanza turned to the saddle bags and began with Joey's help, to unpack mysterious looking bundles. I gathered dry twigs, built a fire between two flat rocks, and went to a distant spring for water. Then, a half hour later, the blue smoke from our fire drifted away among the pines, and the wind bore the mingled odors of coffee and sizzling bacon. We sat in a group around the red tablecloth Wanza spread on the ground. Captain Grif ate but little, but he discoursed at large.

We finished our meal, and lay back on the grass, and saw the sky, blue above the dark tapestry of the forest. From reclining I dropped flat on my back and lay staring up through the chinks in the green roof, while Haidee read Omar aloud, Wanza threw pine cones at the chipmunks, Captain Grif snoozed, and Joey took his bowgun and went off on a still hunt for Indians.

An hour passed. When Haidee ceased reading Wanza sighed and said:

"Why didn't we eat our lunch closer to the spring, I'd like to know. I'll need more water to wash the forks and spoons before we go."

I rose with a resigned air. "I will go to the spring," I said, taking the small tin pail that had been used as a coffee boiler. "But understand we are to have another hour of Omar before we go—this is an intermission merely."

The captain opened one eye, and half closing his big hand made an ineffectual attempt to scoop a fly into his palm.

"I 'low I don't understand that fellow Omar—he don't sound lucid to me," he complained. "I don't know as I relish bein' called a Bubble, exactly, either." He settled back more comfortably. "But he was a philosopher, and I'm a philosopher, so I admire him, and I'll stand by

him. All them old chaps was all right 'ceptin' the lubber that poured treacle on himself to attract the ants—he was sure peculiar! Get away there, you fly! Golly, s-ship-mate, *flies* is bad enough, but *ants!*—"

I made quick work of reaching the spring in spite of the dense underbrush that impeded my steps. But once there I became enamored of a reddish-yellow butterfly—Laura, of the genus Argynnis—and I followed it into a hawthorn thicket, through the thicket to a tangle of moss-festooned birches, and eventually lost the specimen in a dense growth of bramble. I went back to the spring, filled my pail and was stooping to drink when I thought I heard a shot. I could not be certain, as the noise of the water running over a rock bed filled my ears. But I had gone only a few yards from the spring and out into a clearing when I heard unmistakably a shot from my thirty-thirty. I dropped the pail and ran.

When I came to the pine grove where I had left Haidee and Wanza and the captain, I saw a strange sight. Wanza, white-faced and apparently unconscious, lay in a huddled heap on the ground, the twenty-two at her side; Haidee bent over her; the captain stood, wild-eyed, holding my thirty-thirty in his hand; and near them a

silver-tip lay bleeding from a wound in his heart. Even as I went forward to ascertain that the bear had received his quietus, I spoke to the captain.

"Good work, Captain Grif."

When I saw that the bear had been dispatched, I ran back to Wanza's side. The captain had lifted her in his arms, her head was against his breast. The color was coming back to her face.

"Don't try to shoot a bear again with a twenty-two, Wanza," I said, as she unclosed her eyes. She looked at me strangely and shuddered. "Some one had to shoot quick, and I had the twenty-two in my hand." I would have said more, but Joey crept out of the bushes, looked at the bear, then at me, and said:

"Let's go home, Mr. David."

When I was preparing Joey for bed that night, he piped out suddenly: "I saw Wanza shoot the bear."

"Wanza?" I turned on him.

"Yep! Sure. I was in the bushes playing Indian. The bear came out of the huckleberry bushes in the draw, rolling his head awful. Bell Brandon she screamed. Whew, she grabbed Wanza, she did! Captain Grif woke up, and got only on to his knees—he wobbled so!—and then Wanza up with the twenty-two and shot—just

like that! And then she grabbed the big gun and shot again. Then her father he took the gun away from her, and Wanza just fell down on the ground. And then you came."

That same evening I said to Wanza:

"I was very stupid not to understand that you shot first with the twenty-two, and then dispatched the bear with the thirty-thirty. I thought your father killed the bear. Why did you not tell me?"

"It didn't make any difference as I could see who killed the bear. The main thing was to kill it," was the reply I received.

The next day Wanza informed me that Mrs. Olds' patient was able to sit up in bed. "I've been talking to him," she added, with a flirt of her head. "If I was a good reader, now, I'd be glad to read to him a bit."

"I think you are doing very well as you are, Wanza," I replied.

There surged through me the instinctive dislike, almost aversion, I had felt on the night of his coming to Cedar Dale, and my tone was stern.

"He wants me to talk to him though, he says. He says he needs perking up. My, he knows a lot, don't he, Mr. Dale? Seems like he knows everything, 'most. And I do think he's hand-

some. He's got the finest eyes! Though there's something odd about them, too, if you stop to think. The worst with handsome eyes is that you *don't* stop to think! I'm going out now to get some hardhack for him. He says he don't remember ever seeing the pink kind. What do you call it, Mr. Dale?"

"Spiraea tomentosa. Wait a bit, Wanza," I said, "I'll go with you."

We went to the woods. It was morning, and the freshness of the hour was incomparable. The birds were singing with a sort of rapture. And our way through the silent greenwood aisles was wholesome and sweet with the breath of pine and balm o' Gilead. The vistas were rosy with pink hardhack; on either side feathery white clusters of wild clematis festooned the thickets, and here and there the bright faces of roses peeped out at us from tangles of undergrowth.

I know not what spirit of willfulness possessed Wanza. I think she had it in her mind to arouse my jealousy by praise of the big man. Her talk was all of him. Finally I had my say.

"I know nothing of him, Wanza. He may be a splendid chap, of course, and he may be a rascal. Frankly, I do not like him. Admire him, if you want to. But I would rather you did not

chat with him unless Mrs. Olds is present."

"Dear me! How can a little friendly chat hurt any one."

Wanza tucked a wild rose into her curls, and it hung pendent, nodding at me saucily, as she tossed her head and laughed in my face. Her cheeks matched the flower in color. I looked at her admiringly, but my voice was still firm as I said: "I hope you will be careful to give very little of your time to Mrs. Olds' patient."

"Ha, ha," laughed Wanza, crinkling her eyelids and giving me an elfish glance from beneath tawny lashes.

"In a measure," I continued, "you are in my care, and I feel responsible for your associates while you are with me."

"Well," drawled Wanza, "if I'm with an angel 'most all day and all the night—meaning Mrs. Batterly—it sure won't hurt me to talk some to a sinner like the big man. Besides, it'll help out a lot. It'll keep me from getting glum, Mr. Dale." She favored me with another roguish glance. "You wouldn't have me getting glum, would you?"

"I wish the big man were well, and on his way, so that we might use the front room again. Mrs. Batterly has only her room and the Dingle as it

is, and she must grow tired of having her meals in her room," I complained.

"I carried her breakfast to her this morning in the Dingle." There was something defiant in the girl's tone.

"Famous!" I cried.

After a short silence Wanza said provokingly:

"If I want to talk to the big man and Mrs. Olds is out of ear shot I don't see as it can matter."

"Please, Wanza," I insisted, "talk with him as little as possible."

Her eyes were laughing, and teasing and pacifying all at one and the same time. I held out my hand.

"Say you will do as I ask, and give me your hand on it," I implored.

Her eyes were only teasing now. She shook her head, and I dropped my hand and turned away. I heard a rustling among the grasses and thought she had gone. But when after taking a few steps I looked around, there she was, perched on a boulder, her feet drawn up beneath her pink gingham skirt, her arms crossed on her breast, her eyes surveying me steadfastly. I did not smile as I faced her. I merely glanced and swung on my heel.

"Come here," she called.

When I was close beside her again she shook her head more vehemently than before, until all her tiny tight curls bobbed up and down distractingly.

"It won't do," she said.

"What won't do?" I asked.

"Your trying to boss me won't do, my trying to pretend won't do."

"What are you trying to pretend, Wanza?"

"That I'm crazy about the big man. I ain't."

"Oh? Well, I really would have no right to object if you found him attractive. I dare say I have seemed rather dictatorial," I answered chivalrously.

"And something else won't do."

"Pray tell me what it is."

"It won't do for you to pretend, either."

"I? What do I pretend?"

She eyed me gravely, pulled a blade of grass, blew on it, and cast it aside.

"Lot of things," she said then.

"Do I, Wanza?"

"But I can stand anything—anything," she threw out both hands, "except being bossed. I can't stand that."

"No one could," I agreed.

"And you mustn't try it on, because if you do!—me and you will part company."

I was surprised at the hard glint in her eyes, the inflexible tone of her voice. Her face was quite unlovely at that moment.

"Child, child," I began impulsively, but I hesitated and said nothing more, for her eyes with their strange hardness seemed the eyes of a stranger.

The crisp, blue morning paved the way to a hot, still day. I drove to the village for supplies in the afternoon, and after supper I was glad to rest on the river bank, with Joey sprawling on the grass at my side. The moon rose early and climbed into the purple pavilion above us, spraying the world with a wash of gold. The night became serene, almost solemn; one big, bright star burst upon our sight from the top of a low ridge of hills opposite, and threw a linked, sliding silver bridge from one plush river bank to the other. It looked like some strange aerial craft fired with unearthly splendor, and propelled by unguessed sorcery. I was glad to forget the tawdry, painted day that was slipping into the arms of night. It had been a fretting day in many particulars. My morning with Wanza had irked me, I had had almost no conversation with

Haidee, and Mrs. Olds had been exceedingly arbitrary during the evening meal in the hot, stuffy little kitchen. The calm evening hour was like a benediction to me, and Joey's tender little hand stroking mine soothed me inexpressibly.

I was hoping to escape without the usual sleep-time story, but one glance at the eager face showed me that the lad was eagerly expecting its spinning. And his first words were evidently meant to act as an impetus.

"If you was to tell me a story, Mr. David, would it be a fairy one, do you think? Or would it be about a bear, do you 'spose, or a—a tiger?"

I am afraid I spoke rather impatiently.

"Aren't you tired of bears and tigers yet, Joey?"

A wistful voice replied:

"Did you get tired of 'em when you was little, Mr. David?"

"No, no," I answered hastily, "of course, I did not."

The lad rolled over until his brown head rested against my knee.

"To-night I'd liever hear about fairies."

"Honestly, Joey?"

"Yep! Criss cross my heart and hope to die. I like to hear about Dwainies."

"Who calls them Dwainies?"

"Her—Bell Brandon."

The dear homey name! I smiled down into the boy's brown eyes. Suddenly it seemed to me that I should enjoy a talk about Dwainies.

"Well," I began, "I shall tell you a story of a Dwainie called Arethusa. Say it after me, Joey. Arethusa."

"Arethusa," he repeated painstakingly.

"Arethusa was a nymph. She lived in a place called Arcadia. And she slept on a couch of snow in the Acroceraunian mountains. Don't interrupt, please, Joey!—"

"I was only trying to say that big word—it's hard enough to say the name of our own mountains—but Ac—Acro—"

"Never mind. It is not necessary for you to remember all the names in my stories, only the names I ask you to remember."

"Bell Brandon says you're teaching me funny that way. She says you're teaching me stories of the old world before you teach me to speak good English. What's good English, Mr. David?"

"Never mind, lad," I murmured confusedly. My wonder woman was quite right, Joey's English was reprehensible; but I confess I secretly enjoyed it—there was something eminently

Joeyish about it—a quaintness that I found irresistible. I smiled, and sighed, and continued, "Arethusa's hair was rainbow colored, and her eyes were sky blue, and her cheeks coral. Gliding and springing she went, ever singing; you see, she was not only beautiful, but light hearted and pure. The Earth loved her, and the Heaven smiled above her. Now Alpheus was a river-god. He sat very often on a glacier—a cold, cold glacier, and whenever he struck the mountains with his trident great chasms would open, and the whole world about would shake. He saw the Dwainie Arethusa, one day, and as she ran he followed the fleet nymph's flight to the brink of the Dorian sea."

"Oh, oh," breathed my listener, eyes distended, and lips apart. "Did he catch her?"

"He followed her to the brink—the edge, Joey—of the sea. Arethusa cried: 'Oh, save me! Oh, guide me! And bid the deep hide me, for he grasps me now by the hair—' "

"Her rainbow hair?"

"Yes, yes,—don't interrupt."

"Who did she yell to?"

"The loud Ocean heard. It stirred, and divided—parted, boy—and 'under the water the Earth's white daughter fled like a sunny beam.' "

"Hm! What did the river-god do then?"

"He pursued her. He descended after her. 'Like a gloomy stain on the emerald main.' "

"But did he get her, Mr. David?"

"Well, Arethusa was changed into a stream by Diana, and the stream was turned into a fountain in the island of Ortygia, and Alpheus the river-god still pursuing her, finally won her, and they dwelt single-hearted in the fountains of Enna's mountains."

There was a burst of roguish laughter behind me.

"What a classic tale for a child mind," a light voice cried.

Haidee stood among the shadows of the cottonwoods, swaying between her crutches.

"Mrs. Olds has sent me in search of you. The canteen you soldered for her patient's use has come unsoldered, the tin lining of the fireless cooker has sprung a leak, the big man has to be lifted while his bed is being changed, and she wants to know if you forgot to purchase the malted milk this afternoon—she can't find it anywhere. She said, too, that you had signified your intention of rubbing soap on the doors to prevent their squeaking. She also said something about procrastination, but it sounded hackneyed—quite

as if I had heard it somewhere before—so I left rather precipitately."

All the while I was soldering the canteen for the big man's feet, I could hear Wanza chattering blithely with the patient in the front room. She came out to me after awhile, and stood at my elbow as I examined the cooker. I frowned at her, and received a moue in return.

"I've been telling the big man about my peddler's cart," she ventured finally. "He's so set on seeing it, soon as he's well enough! Seems he never saw one. He can't talk much, he's that weak yet—like a baby! But I can talk to him."

"I shall not ask you not to talk with him, again, Wanza," I announced.

"It's just as well, seeing as I know what I'm about. Land! the poor man! He needs some one to talk to him. I don't notice you hurting yourself seeing after him, Mr. David Dale!"

I felt very weary and intolerably disgusted with everything, and I answered sharply, "That's my own affair." The next minute I saw the blood spurt from my palm, and realized even as Wanza cried out that I had cut myself rather badly on the tin lining of the cooker. I turned faint and dizzy, and opening the door I plunged out into the night air followed closely by Wanza.

"It's nothing," I kept saying, keeping my hand behind me as she would have examined it.

"Please—please, Mr. Dale, let me look at it."

She pressed forward to my side and reached around behind me for my hand. I could feel her quivering in every limb.

"It's nothing," I maintained, though the pain was intense, and the rapid flow of blood was weakening me.

"It is something. Oh, if only to be kind to me, Mr. Dale, let me have your hand!"

We struggled, my other arm went around her, and I attempted to draw her back and sweep her around to my uninjured side. I was obstinate and angry, and she was persistent and tearful, and we wrestled like two foolish children. "Please, please," she kept repeating, and I reiterated, "No." It must have looked uncommonly like a love scene to a casual onlooker, and Haidee's voice speaking through the dusk gave me an odd thrill.

"I have called and called you, Wanza," she was saying. "Will you go to Mrs. Olds, please? I think she wants water from the spring, or the malted milk prepared, or—or something equally trivial."

I released my prisoner and she sped away. I

was left to peer through the darkness at Haidee and vainly conjure my mind for something to say. The drip, drip of the blood from my cut on to the maple leaves at my feet, gave me a disagreeable sensation. I felt weakened, and slow in every pulse. I thought of words, but had no will to voice them, and so I stood staring stupidly at the vision before me. She spoke with a strange little gasp in her voice at last.

"I think I have been mistaken in you, Mr. Dale."

"You are making a mistake now," I replied hoarsely. There was a peculiar singing in my ears, and a buzzing in my brain where small wheels seemed to be grinding round, so that my tone was not convincing, and as I spoke I leaned my shoulder against a tree from sheer weakness. In my own ears my words sounded shallow and ineffectual. I tried to speak again but succeededed in making only a clicking sound in my throat. I felt myself slipping weakly lower and lower, though I dug my feet into the turf and braced my knees heroically. Faster and faster the wheels went round. I felt that Haidee was moving toward the cabin away from me. I tried to call her name. But I was floundering in a quagmire of unreality; I groped in a dubious

morass darkly, straining toward the light. My knees felt like pulp, they yielded completely and I slid ignominiously to the ground, rolled over, and lay inert, waves of darkness washing over me.

It was Joey who found me, whose tears on my face aroused me. His grief was wild. His lamentations echoed around me. He was moaning forth: "Mr. David, Mr. David," in a frenzy, laying his face on mine, patting my cheeks, lifting my eyelids with trembling fingers. "Are you killed? Are you killed?" I heard him wail. "Oh dear, dear, my own Mr. David, please open your eyes and speak to Joey!"

A light from a lantern struck blindingly into my eyes as I unclosed them and I quickly lowered my lids. But my lad had seen the sign of life and I heard him call: "Wanza, Wanza, come quick! Mr. David is laying here all bloody and hurted."

I struggled to a sitting posture as Wanza came forward at a run, swinging her lantern. A few minutes later I sat on a bench in the workshop while Wanza bathed and dressed my hand and gave me a sip of brandy from a bottle she found in the cupboard over one of the small windows. I was ashamed of my weakness and I

apologized for it, explaining that I had never been able to endure the sight of blood with fortitude, and admitting that the tin had cut rather deep.

"Now you just crawl into bed and go to sleep and forget all about it," she crooned, mothering me, with a gentle hand on my hair. She went to my bunk in the corner, shook up the pillows and straightened the blankets, and catching up the pail of water filled the basin on the wash bench. "Wash your face and hands, you Joe," she ordered. "Then come outside and I'll hear you say your prayers."

I was lying in my bunk half asleep, though tortured by the remembrance of Haidee's words, when I heard the following oddly disjointed prayer from the river bank.

"Now I lay me—Oh, God, thank you for not letting Mr. David bleed to death—I pray the Lord—'Cause if he had bled to death I'd want to die too—my soul to keep—he's all I got, and I want to thank you for him, God— Wait, Wanza, this is a new prayer I'm saying! I am going to ask God to bless you, too. Bless Wanza, please, God,—but bless Mr. David the most,—oh, the most of anybody in the whole world! Amen."

Soon Joey came pattering in to the shop and very gingerly crawled in beside me. He was asleep, and I was lying miserably brooding, when Wanza called softly just outside the window: "Mr. Dale—hoo-hoo!"

"Yes, Wanza?" I answered.

"I've been to the cabin—in the cedar room—talking with Mrs. Batterly. I told her all about your cutting your hand, and—and how you would not let me look at it—and how silly I was, trying to make you—when she come up. I told her how I found you on the ground—and—and everything. Go to sleep now."

"I shall, Wanza. Thank you," I cried gratefully.

CHAPTER XVII

THE DREAM IN THE DINGLE

A FEW days later I was summoned to the big man's side as he sat, fully dressed for the first time, outside the cabin in the shade of a cedar. I sat beside him while he thanked me for my hospitality, and said it was his intention to push on to Roselake and thence to Wallace that very afternoon.

"I have business to transact there for my partner, Dick Bailey, who died in Alaska last winter," he said, and stopped short, looking at me with a sudden question in his eyes. "By the bye, you people seem to be laboring under the impression that my name is Bailey," he added.

"Mrs. Olds found the name on a pocketbook you carried," I explained.

"To be sure—I was carrying an old wallet of Bailey's. Our initials are the same, too." He fell to musing, wrinkling his brows. But instead of telling me his name, he went on presently: "You are master of a somewhat unusual house-

hold, Dale. I am vastly interested. You're a lucky dog to have such a Hebe for a protégée as the girl Wanza, such an infant prodigy as that young scamp, who shows fine discrimination, and glowers at me from the kitchen door, for an adopted son,—and who is the interesting lady patient on whom Wanza waits and who is shut up in a Blue Beard's closet next my room? I have a sly sure instinct that tells me she is the most wonderful of the lot."

The blood rushed to my face. The leer with which he accompanied his words was rakish, and his handsome face smirked disgustingly.

"She is an unfortunate neighbor of mine, who was crippled by a falling tree the night of the storm," I answered coldly.

He gave me a quizzical glance, shrugged his shoulders, and exclaimed laughingly:

"Beauty in distress! Don Quixote to the rescue. You're the sort of chap, I fancy, Dale, who goes about tilting at windmills. You belong to a past generation. But it is lucky for me I stumbled across you. Well, I care not to pry into your Blue Beard's closet—the girl Wanza is a piquant enough little devil for me—"

"Just speak more respectfully of her, if you must speak at all," I interrupted with heat.

"Don Quixote, Don Quixote," he murmured, wagging a broad finger at me, and shaking his head playfully.

I said something beneath my breath, and rose from my chair hastily.

"Wait! Wait!" he cried. "Don't let your choler rise. Sit down. We will not discuss the ladies. I was about to tell you my name, and give you my credentials—"

He broke off abruptly. Joey was issuing from the elder bushes piping on his flute. As I listened, a voice from the Dingle caught up the refrain, a voice high and sweet and clear.

"Bell Brandon was the birdling of the mountains—"

The line ended in a ripple of laughter. The man before me half raised in his seat. Then sweeter and lower:

"And I loved the little beauty, Bell Brandon—
And she sleeps 'neath the old arbor tree."

The underbrush parted and Haidee came toward us, leaning slightly on one crutch. In her hand she carried a great bunch of pink spirea. Each cheek was delicately brushed with color, her star-eyes were agleam, her lips curved with laughter.

And then, all suddenly, the dimples and laughter and life fled from her beautiful face, her eyes turned dull and anguished. She was looking at the big man, and he was looking at her. His pasty face was gray as ashes. His little eyes contracted to pin-points.

Haidee's dry lips writhed apart. One word dropped from them:

"You!"

She crouched forward, peered at him intently through the soft green shadows of the cedars, her eyes growing bigger as if wild with a sudden hope that they might have played her a trick. And then gradually the intentness left them, they hardened, and her whole face stiffened, and grew white and grim.

The big man had risen. He took a step forward now. There was something bullying in his attitude, something implacable in his altered face. His light eyes had a sinister gleam, but his *savoir-faire* did not desert him. He spoke to me, but his eyes never left the marble face of the woman who confronted him.

"Mr. Dale," he said with a wave of the hand, "pardon our agitation. I am Randall Batterly. This is the first time my wife and I have met in five years."

I reached Haidee's side just in time, for the crutch slipped from her grasp, and she would have fallen but for my steadying arm.

Joey, the dauntless, sprang forward and menaced the big man with threatening, childish fist. "You leave my Bell Brandon alone!" he screamed, "you leave her alone—you big, bad man! I wish we'd let you die, I do."

I placed Haidee in a chair. I took Joey's hand and led him indoors. I heard a wild cry ring out:

"I thought you were dead in the Yukon, Randall Batterly, I thought you were dead. I hate you! I hate you!"

I closed the door on her agonized weeping.

Before the big man left that day he sent Wanza to ask me to come to him in the living room. I was in my workshop, and I shook my head when the message was delivered. In the mood I was in then it was well for me not to go to him. I shall never forget the expression on Mrs. Olds' face when she sought me in the shop a half hour later to bid me good-bye. She had found, at last, food for her prying, suspicious mind.

"I am that shocked and surprised, Mr. Dale!" she gasped, all of a flutter. "Why, I'm just

trembly! I heard high voices, and I stole out on the porch, and there they were, saying such dreadful, dreadful things to each other! And isn't it odd, Mr. Dale, that they should come together here in this remote—I was going to say God forsaken—spot, this way? Now, don't you suppose they will patch up their differences? I should think they might—they're young folks—it seems a pity the amount of domestic infelicity nowadays—and they are a likely fine looking couple." She drew breath, shook her head, and paused dramatically.

I felt her fish-eyes searching my face.

Then she broke out, as I maintained an apparently unruffled front:

"Of course, Mr. Dale, it is not for me to say all I think—not for me to say whose is the fault. But I must say I am surprised and disappointed—yes, and shocked—shocked, Mr. Dale, that Mrs. Batterly, a married woman, should proclaim herself a widow. When a woman will do that—why, what is one to think! I can't abide duplicity. To my notion there is absolutely no excuse for that, Mr. Dale. And if she did not know her husband was alive—well, I have no words."

I was sullen-hearted enough, God knows, and

Mrs. Olds' inane, arrogant drivel was like tinder on a blown fire. I was wild as an enraged bull who has the red scarf flaunted in his long suffering face. I thrust out my chin and I squared my shoulders, and I know my face must have grown ugly with my red-eyed anger.

If I had spoken then, I am sure Mrs. Olds could have guessed most accurately at the state of my heart with regard to Haidee. But just at that moment the cedar waxwing left its cage, circled about my head, and descended to settle in the crook of my arm. I straightened my arm, and it hopped to my outspread palm, looking up at me with pert, bright eyes. In that short space during which the bird poised there, I thought of a hundred poignant things to say to Mrs. Olds. But the bird flew away and I said not one of them.

After I had bidden good-bye to Mrs. Olds there was Wanza still to be reckoned with. I had just seen from my window the flurried departure of the nurse and her patient on the afternoon stage when I heard a tentative voice at my elbow, murmur: "Mr. Dale."

I am sure there must have been a certain fierceness in my bearing as I wheeled about. But I was all unprepared for the fervid face that my

lips almost brushed as I turned, the depth of emotion in the burningly blue eyes.

"Don't!" she breathed, as I faced her. "Don't, please!"

"Don't what, child?" I articulated.

"Don't look at me so sharp—so awful!" Her voice thinned, as if she were going to cry. Her brown, pleading hands came out to me. "I only want to say good-bye."

As I still stood woodenly, looking at her, she moved back with a swift jerk of her slim body and put her hands behind her. Her face altered. It whitened, and she let her lids droop over eyes suddenly hot with resentment. Feeling like a brute I made haste to intercept the hands. I slipped my arms about her, caught the hands, and drew them around against my chest. I think I had never liked Wanza better than at that moment in her hurt pride, and womanliness.

"Dear Wanza," I said, "my dear child—"

She pressed against me suddenly, and put her soft cheek against my sleeve.

"What is it, child, what is it?" I begged. I put my hand gently on her hair.

"I'm going away, Mr. Dale—I'm going! I been so happy here—with you and Joey and the birds."

Her breaths were sobs.

It was my turn to say "Don't!" I said it imploringly, and I added: "I cannot bear to see you cry, Wanza."

"Oh, let me cry! I'm upset, and nervous, and —and sad—I guess you'd call it. I'm going on home now, and set things to rights a bit, and tonight I'm going to Hidden Lake to stay with Mrs. Batterly. I promised."

"She needs you, Wanza," I said.

"I was to ask you if you would ride through the woods with her, in a half hour. She's not quite fit to go alone, Mr. Dale." Suddenly Wanza broke into a tempest of tears, and sobbed and shook, huddled against my shoulder, stammering: "Everything is upside down—upside down! But—yes, Mr. Dale, I am glad—glad—that Mrs. Batterly has got a husband living. He's probably a bad man, and if she wanted to run away it was all right and nobody's business. But it had to come out that she had a husband, and I'm glad it's come—that's all! I'm glad it's come—now—afore—"

I looked down at the opulent fleece of hair spinning into artless spirals of maze against my shoulder, and I threaded a curl through my fingers absently before I probed this significant,

stumbling final sentence. Then I caught at the lost word. "Before, Wanza? Before—what!"

"Before you got to thinking too much of her."

I laughed. I stood away from the child and laughed ironically. The laugh saved the situation. Wanza raised her head, gave a watery smile, and flung out.

"You needn't laugh. You were thinking too much of her—you know you was."

"Please, Wanza,—don't!"

"Now your face is black again." Wanza's mood changed swiftly. "Oh, Mr. Dale, I have a weight here," she laid her hand on her chest. "I feel things pressing,—awful things! What's going to happen, do you think, that I feel so queer and blue and bad?"

I shook my head. She went on quickly:

"Of course I'm broke up about leaving Cedar Dale just now, I just can't bear to quit you and Joey—and the birds—and squirrels—and flowers—"

The tears were brimming up again in the velvet-blue eyes. I walked over to the waxwing's cage, snapped shut the door on the tiny prisoner, and handed the cage to Wanza.

"Take him with you," I bade her.

With the cage clasped in her arms, her eyes

flooded with tears, but with smiles on her mobile lips, she went from the shop, backward, step by step.

After Wanza came Joey. A transfigured Joey. Wild with rage at the big man, threatening, and bombastic. Then softening into plaintive grief, wailing:

"Oh, Mr. David, my Bell Brandon's going! She's going! She won't be here to-night for my sleep-time story. She won't be here when I wake up to-morrow. She won't ever stay here again."

"No, lad," I replied.

"Won't she, don't you 'spose? P'r'aps if she don't like it at Hidden Lake she'll come back. Don't you think she'll come again, Mr. David?"

"No," I repeated, sadly.

He sniffled. Then he said, in a frightened tone, "Wanza ain't going too, is she?"

"Yes, Joey."

He drew his sleeve across his eyes. He swallowed. Then he said, winking hard, "I'll miss Bell Brandon, but I'll miss Wanza most."

After a moment, I ventured:

"You have me, Joey."

He drew his sleeve across his eyes again, gulped, and muttered:

"I'm 'shamed. I love you most! But she's mothery—Wanza is, that's it!"

Mothery—Wanza of the wind's will—mothery!

I keep a picture still in my mind of that last day on which I rode through the forest with Haidee to Hidden Lake. Rain had drenched the earth the previous night, and though the sun smiled from a cloudless sky, the roads were heavy and our horses' progress slow. There was a languid drowsiness in the air, enhanced by the low, incessant singing of catbird, robin and lark, and the overpowering scent of syringa and rose. We chose a shadowy trail, and our heads were brushed by white-armed flowery hawthorns, while honeysuckle threw fragrant tendrils across our way. The woods glowed emerald-green, and dappled gray, gemmed here and there with dogwood; great plumes of spirea rose like pink clouds in the purple vistas. Small hollows held crystal-clear water, and up from these hollows floated swarms of azure butterflies. We crossed a swift running stream; and before us, between smooth, mossy banks fern-topped, lay a cup-like dell, shut in by shrubs and vines. I drew rein, and dismounted, and Haidee with a swift glance at my face drew in her mare.

I went to her side.

She held some purple flowers in the bend of her arm, flowers that Joey had given her, she fingered the petals with a caressing touch. Her head drooped slightly, but her eyes met mine questioningly. The pallor of her face but made it more exquisite. Her gown was gray. Its folds rippled about her slight form. She seemed like some grave-eyed spirit. Her hair was in braids, outlining the ivory of her face. A scarf of white muslin left her warm throat bare.

I strove for words. But I could only whisper:

"I am your friend. Never forget. If danger ever threatens you—"

"If danger ever threatened me, I believe that you would intervene—you are a brave man, David Dale. But I shall live safely—going on with my even life—in my little cabin, with good Wanza for a companion. I have had a shock, Mr. Dale," her voice quivered, her lips whitened with the words, "oh, such a shock! It is better not to speak of it. Not at least unless I tell you all there is to tell, and I am not ready as yet to do that." She struggled with herself. She drew a deep breath. "But I came here to work! I shall work as I have planned until autumn, then —well, I do not know what then. You heard

much yesterday—you know my attitude toward the man who is my husband. I dare say you are shocked, and shaken in your chivalrous estimate of me. I cannot help that. I do not feel that I can explain—it goes too deep. It is not to be laid bare before—forgive me—a stranger."

She smiled at me sadly as if to soften the last words. But hurt and amazed, I cried:

"A stranger! Am I that?"

A light sprang into her eyes, the red came into her cheeks.

"Forgive me," she said again.

"I am your friend—your true friend—no stranger." I held out my hand. "I thought you understood."

She kept her eyes upon me, but did not seem to see me. They were hunted, weary eyes; weary to indifference, I saw suddenly. And seeing this I took her slim fingers in mine and pressed them very gently and let them go.

Suddenly her composure broke. She turned whiter, she could scarcely breathe. She moved her head restlessly. "I can't bear it—I can't—I can't! I wish I might fly to the ends of the earth —but there's no escape." She brushed her hand across her face. She cowered in her saddle. "It's awful! I thought he was gone forever—

forever, do you understand? Oh, the freedom, the rest—the peace! With his return has come the shadow of an old, old grief. It blots out the sunshine."

My lips twitched as I attempted soothing words. I took her cold hands and chafed them. "Courage," I whispered. She shook her head, quivering, panting and undone.

"Oh, I was born to live! Courage? I have none!"

She leaned forward and sunk her head on the pommel of the saddle. After a time she swung toward me. Her hair swept about her flaming cheeks, and veiled her burning eyes. She looked like some hunted wild thing.

"I hate him," she hissed. "He knows I hate him. He does not care."

We looked at each other.

"But he cares for you," I stated.

"No, no," she said, hastily, "don't say that."

Again we scanned each other's faces. I spoke impetuously:

"You believe in Destiny. Well, so do I! But we are not weak instruments. You know what I mean. What law of society compels you to a bondage such as you hint at? You are a strong-minded woman. Now that you know the

worst you have weapons to fight with. As soon as you look about you—when you come to face the facts, you will see this." I struggled with my thoughts, then I threw wide my arms. "God knows what I am to say to you!"

She lifted up her head. "I have promised him to do nothing—to go on as I have been—he will not molest me."

I half shrugged. "He loves you; of course, you believe that."

"He may. He protested that he did, when I told him I must go my way."

I heard her dully, my eyes on her face. She said a few more words brokenly, that I scarce gave ear to. At the conclusion of them I looked away to the purple wood vista. "Why did it please God," I said, "to have you cross my path!"

Tears filled her eyes. "Those words did not sound like the words of a friend."

"But they are said." I moved away, she sat brooding. I mounted, and came to her side. "We are friends, we may be friends, surely! May I come to see you?"

"Indeed you must come. Your visits will be welcome." She smiled, but her smile was twisted and dubious. "I expect great things of Wanza. She will be my entertainer. She will cheer me.

Have Joey come to me—" Her voice failed her utterly. She was pale again as the syringa blooms at her side.

"We must push on, now," I said.

She gathered up her reins.

And so we rode side by side to the little shack on the shore of Hidden Lake. But when she gave me her hand at parting, I stumblingly cried: "If he had not come—if he had not come, I should have tried to win your love!" Something in her eyes caused me to add: "I wonder if I should have succeeded."

She paled and drew her hand from mine. "I could have loved you, David Dale," she whispered.

That night when Joey was preparing for bed in the cedar room, I spied a bit of ribbon the color of the gowns Wanza wore, wreathed in among the grasses in the magpie's cage. And at the sight Joey cried out:

"That's Wanza's. I want her! I want her to come back and stay, I do."

Holding the ribbon in my hand, I passed out to the Dingle.

Here I sat down on the stump by the pool, in a ring of black shadow cast by the cedars, and lifted my face to the stars that were shining

through the wattled green roof above my head. I was worn, physically and mentally, by the experiences of the day. I sat there stupidly, scarce moving, letting my pipe go out as I fed my grief with memories. Joey called out at intervals: "Good night, Mr. David, dear." Each time I responded: "Good night, Joey." At last no sound came from the cedar room. I knew he slept. It was very still in the Dingle. A toad hopped across the stone walk and a grass-snake flashed through the rose hedge, like a quick flame. Close to the pool's brink the big flag-flowers vacillated in a faint, upspringing breeze, and the rushes swayed and shuddered above the timorous bluebells. The moon came up slowly, and I saw its face through the tree spaces. I wondered if Haidee were watching it from the shore of Hidden Lake. And then a naked Desolation crept up out of an unknown void, and I saw the gleam of its whitened bones. It gibed me. It trailed its bleached carcass across my arid path. The hour grew hideous. I felt myself alone—grievously alone—on the verge of utmost solitude, reaching out ineffectual hands toward emptiness. I recoiled, my senses whirling, from the limitless nothingness into which my vision pored.

I was clammy, with a cold sweat. My throat was dry. But the horror passed and I grew apathetic at length, and sodden. Then calm, merely. Soon I grew strangely somnolent. I nodded. But after a space I sat tense, my chin sunk, listening. A vague stirring in the night chilled my blood, and at the same time thrilled me. I listened and watched, breathing heavily, alert and narrow-eyed.

And then!

I saw Wanza part the tangles of syringa, and stand pink-robed, framed in white blossoms. Her face, rose-tinted and impassioned, was curtained on either side by her unbound resplendent hair. Her eyes, laughing and bright like happy stars, shone through the wilderness of locks. Her lips, smooth and pink as polished coral, smiled freshly as the lips of a tender child. Her arms were bare. In her strong brown hands she bore a wooden cage, and the waxwing slept within, its head beneath its wing. She hesitated, apparently saw no one—listened and heard no sound. She spurned her flowered frame, and came springing forward, her short skirt fluttering above her bare knees, her pink feet gleaming in the long grasses.

She passed close to me. Noiselessly she

swept to the steps of the cedar room. She mounted. I saw her pass through the open doorway, where there was a pale nimbus of light. I saw her at the window. She took the magpie's cage from its hook, and hung the waxwing there instead. Soon she reappeared. She carried the magpie in its cage. She came down the steps, and I heard a voice like a "moon-drowned" dream murmur roguishly:

"I have left them the waxwing. But I have taken away the magpie, lest it tell my secrets."

I would have stopped her. But she had sprung with fluttering, perfumed haste through the syringa frame and vanished.

I dropped to the turf, clasped my arms about my head, and slept, a deep, refreshing sleep. It was dawn when I awakened, a pink, sweet-smelling dawn, scintillant with promise. I went to the cedar room, Joey slept, one arm thrown out above his touseled head, the shawl-flower quilt tossed aside. I covered him, and crossed to the window.

The magpie's cage swung in its accustomed place.

As I approached, the bird fixed me with its quick, bright eye, and chortled:

"Mr. David Dale! Fixing man! Mr. David —dear."

How strange that I should dream of Wanza!

Dreary days followed for Joey and me.

As the days began to shorten I rode frequently to Captain Grif's in the cool of the evening, taking Joey on the saddle behind me. And each night Joey dropped asleep on the small bed in Wanza's room while I played a rubber of chess with the captain. When Father O'Shan was present a new zest was given our evenings.

One stormy night Father O'Shan, Joey and I were belated at the cottage, and the father and I kept our good host up to an unconscionable hour in the room beneath the eaves, while Joey slept peacefully on the lower floor. Father O'Shan was in fine fettle, and his stories were pungent, his drollery inimitable. As the storm began I rolled into the captain's bunk and lay there in vast contentment. The port hole was open, framing an oval of purple sky and drifting cloud rack. My fantasy was so keen that I could fairly smell the odor of bilge and stale fish and tar, and hear the tramp of feet on the deck over my head. When the storm was at its fiercest, and the little cottage shook and the lightning flashed through the port hole, it was easy to cheat

myself into the belief that I was experiencing all the wild delights of a storm at sea.

The talk had turned on the superstitions of men who go down to the sea in ships. "Lonely men are superstitious men," the father said. "There is something about aloneness that engenders visions and superstitions. People who dwell apart all have their visions."

"And their madnesses," I interjected. "People who live at the edge of things are entitled to their superstitions. During the first months of my life on my homestead, before Joey's advent, I had one or two narrow squeaks—came within an ace of insanity, I believe now. I went so far that like the man in the story I met myself coming round the corner of the cabin one day. I pulled up then and went to the city for a month and took a rather menial position."

Father O'Shan was looking at me curiously.

"I never heard of that before," he said. "You pulled through all right."

"Oh, yes! If it had not been for my dog I might have gone under the first year. But the dog was understanding."

"A dog," Captain Grif explained carefully, "is the instinctinest animal there be—and the faithfulest."

I caught Father O'Shan's eyes fixed on me ruminatingly from time to time during the evening. Once or twice, meeting my eyes, he favored me with his rare, heart-warming smile. When I said good night to him in the village, leaning from the saddle and shifting Joey's sleeping figure somewhat, in order that I might offer him my hand, he pressed close to my horse's side and peered up at me with friendly glance through the semi-darkness of the dimly lighted street.

"Too bad, Dale—too bad," he said in his winning tones.

"Eh? Just what is too bad?" I asked.

He gripped my hand.

"Man, I'm sorry I did not know you in the darkest days—when the dog was understanding. I'd have tried to be understanding, too. A pity, Dale—a pity!"

"Never mind!"

"I shall pass through this world but once, you know—I don't want to leave more things undone than I have to. But the unguessed things—that lurk quite obscure—they have a way of unearthing themselves—they hurt, Dale! Why, my boy, I rode past your cabin when you were putting the roof on! But I was busy. I did not stop. Oh, well—I'm glad you had your dog!"

CHAPTER XVIII

"THANK YOU, MR. FIXING MAN"

THE bathing and dressing of Joey on Sunday morning, with Sunday school in prospect, had always been an indeterminate process, a sort of blind bargain. But with each week that was added to his age it became not only precarious, but downright fagging, and nerve racking to a degree. When he was a wee urchin and could go into the wash tub in the kitchen for his weekly scouring, the process was comparatively simple, but now that his long legs precluded that possibility, a liberal soaping and sponge bath beside the tub was the alternative, and I found the operation decidedly ticklish.

He knew the minutiæ of the bath so well that if I neglected the least detail, or varied the prescribed form, I was called to severe account.

On the Sunday morning following our late evening at Captain Grif's we arose late, and consequently there was a scramble to get our breakfast over and the water heated for the bath. But in

due time all the preliminaries were adjusted and Joey, stripped to the waist, knelt down beside the tub according to our usual custom, that I might first give his hair a thorough washing.

"You shouldn't rub soap on it," he demurred, as I turned to the soap dish. "Bell Brandon says so. She says that's what makes my hair so brash and funny."

"Brash, Joey?"

"That's what she said."

My jaw dropped. "How shall we get it clean, boy?"

"You make a lather. Shave off little chunks of soap and put 'em in a bottle and shake 'em up with water."

These directions were followed, and both Joey and I were gratified with the result, but precious moments were consumed in the process.

After that Joey got water in his ear, and had to dance like a Piute, on one leg, and shake his head until it was dislodged. Next he sat on the side of the tub and tipped it sufficiently to deluge the floor with half the contents. This necessitated a scurry for the mop, and when I rather curtly declined the lad's services, tears came to the brown eyes, his head drooped, and quite a quarter of an hour was expended in salving his feelings, sub-

mitting to bear hugs and listening to assurances that he had not meant to spill his bath water.

After that we got down to business, and I stood Joey in the tub, soaped him well, soused him with the sponge quickly, and rubbed him with a coarse towel until his small body was in a glow. As I was drying his feet, he said gently:

"I guess I'm a little boy yet, ain't I, Mr. David? I guess it's a good thing you know how to take care of me."

He rubbed his cheek against my arm.

"Where's your shirt, boy?"

He pointed.

Oh, such a pitiful, faded, abject blue and white rag it seemed, hanging on the chair back! I turned it this way and that, regarding it dubiously.

"Will it do, Joey?"

"Why, yes, sure it'll do. My, course it'll do."

I sighed. "We'll have to get some new ones when you start to school, boy."

"Well, but when I wear the tie Bell Brandon gave me, who sees the shirt," he said absently.

I looked around at him. He was inspecting a red, angry looking mark on his chest. "Will that always be there, Mr. David?" he asked plain-

tively, touching it. "It always has been there. What makes it?"

"It's a birth mark, Joey. If ever you should get stolen, and when I found you a bad man should say: 'He's not your boy,' I could answer: 'My boy has a round red mark on his chest.' See how fine that would be."

Joey laughed, and held out his arms for the shirt.

A few minutes later I was arranging the gaily striped Windsor tie beneath the turn down collar of the worn shirt, when the familiar sound of creaking harness and whirring wheels reached my ear. Wanza had not paid Cedar Dale a visit since the day she went away in tearful silence bearing the waxwing with her.

When I opened the door and saw her riant face my spirits lightened suddenly, and a spray of sunshine seemed to sweeten the dingy kitchen as she stepped over the threshold.

"Am I in time?" she breathed.

"In time? In time for what, Wanza?" I asked.

She dropped a bundle on to the table.

"In time for Joey to wear one of these to Sunday school?" she said, portentously.

Joey crept closer. Her eyes as they turned to

him were blue as summer skies and as shining. She snapped the string that held the bundle intact. Joey and I saw an amazing array of small shirts—checked shirts, striped shirts, white shirts.

"Where—where did they come from, Wanza?" stammered Joey.

But I had guessed.

"Well, it's the first real present I've ever made you, Joey. It sure won't be the last! Hustle into the cedar room now, and get into the white one with the frills—the white ones are for Sunday school."

I could say nothing. And as for Joey, he gathered the shirts in his arms and went away to the cedar room snivelling. Wanza and I were left to look into each other's faces questioningly. "How is it with you, Wanza?" I asked, just as she put the query, "How do you get along, Mr. Dale?"

We both laughed, and the awkwardness of the situation was relieved.

"I miss you terribly, Wanza," I confessed. "My sour dough bread turns to dust and ashes in my mouth."

Her soft eyes were commiserating. "I'll fetch you a good sweet loaf of my baking, now and then," she volunteered quickly.

"And don't drive by as you have been doing. Are you too busy to stop as you used to do, girl?" I asked.

"I'm busy, all right." She lifted the cover from a small tin pail on the back of the stove, and sniffed with the air of a connoisseur at the yeast it contained. "That needs more sugar!"

"It needs doctoring," I conceded ruefully. "I set it last night and it has not risen."

"Has Joey been having his bath here?"

"Yes."

She looked about her.

"I'll straighten around a bit, I believe. Empty that tub, and open the windows, Mr. Dale, and I'll get the broom and give the cabin a thorough cleaning. And then before I go I'll set some yeast for you that'll raise the cover off the pail in no time."

Later as I was holding the dust pan for Wanza, Joey came from the cedar room fresh and smiling in the white shirt, the Windsor tie in his hand. Wanza laid aside her broom, and with deft fingers fastened the tie into a wonderful bow beneath the boy's chin. He kissed us both, and we went with him to the meadow bars where Buttons was tethered. I lifted him to the saddle and stood looking after him with a thrill of pride

as he rode away. In his new white shirt and clean corduroy trousers, with his hair carefully brushed and his adorable brown face aglow and his big bright eyes radiant with happiness he was a charming enough picture of boyhood; and a prick of pleasure so sharp as to be almost pain ran through me as he jauntily blew me a kiss, and cried:

"I have my penny for the cradle-roll lady, and I have not forgot my handkerchief."

That night I dropped asleep in the Dingle and again I dreamed of Wanza. She came in her pink gown and bare feet as she had come before; but this time she carried loaves of steaming, sweet-smelling bread in her arms; and she came straight to my side, saying: "This bread is sweet and wholesome, you poor, poor fellow." It seemed to me that she knelt and fed me portions of the bread with pitying fingers. And never had morsel tasted more sweet.

As the days went by, in spite of Wanza's promises, the girl came but seldom to Cedar Dale. And when I met her on the river road or in the village, she seemed distrait and strangely shy and awkward, and vastly uncommunicative, so that I felt forlorn enough; and I was wholly out of touch with my wonder woman.

I applied myself feverishly to my writing. All day long I labored in my shop, in order to earn the daily bread for Joey and myself, but each night I wrote. The novel was almost finished; and something told me it was good.

The weeks passed, and August was waning. The foliage was yellowing along the river that crawled like a golden, sluggish serpent in and out among the brittle rushes. September was waiting with lifted paint brush. The beauty of the dreamy, ripe hours made my senses ache. The earth seemed to lie in a trembling sleep, folded in fiery foliage. The hills were plumed with trees of flame. At night the moon's face was warm and red, all day the sun burned copper colored through a light blue haze.

There was something melting and dreamy in the days as they slipped past—days when I found it hard to labor in the shop—the woods were melodious still with bird voices, and all outdoors called to me.

I took a week's vacation and fished hard by the village, where the stream threads the meadows; companioned by Father O'Shan, I rode along the river bank in the sunset and tramped the illumined fields starred with sumach, and in the moonlight during that week, I sometimes allowed

myself to drift in my canoe on the river, thinking, thinking, of Haidee—of the narrow oval of her face curtained in dark hair streams, of the shadowy eyes of her, of her sweet warm smile.

And then one day I made up my mind suddenly to go to her.

At the first glimpse I had of her cabin, standing a crude, warped, misshapen thing on the slight rise of ground beneath the cedars, all my former resolves to give to this habitation some slight air of comfort and refinement rose up and confronted me, and I saw myself a weak fellow, who had nursed his despair and disappointment and failed in his duty to the woman he loved, and who in his cowardice had absented himself from his loved one, when he might have brought her comfort and neighborly assistance.

On the back of an old envelope with a stub of a pencil I made a rough sketch of the improvements I had long since planned, and when Haidee and Wanza came to the door, I greeted them calmly and showed them the sketch. Haidee stood there, without her crutches, her hair unbound about her ivory face. Her gown was white, and a scarf of rose color swung from her shoulders. She looked at me for a long moment with eyes dull and faded as morning stars, and

then gradually the old familiar light came back into her face, her eyes warmed and grew human. She stepped outside, and joined me on the porch.

"You have laid aside your crutches?" I ventured.

"Yes."

"You are well?" I asked.

"Oh, yes! I work—hard—at various things. Do I not, Wanza? I sleep. I have a splendid appetite. And you?"

"I work. I sleep well, too. I drop asleep in the Dingle occasionally after a hard day's work. The Dingle is Wanza's retreat—she walks there. Do you know it, Wanza?"

She came to my side quickly. Her face displayed signs of perturbation. "I walk there! What do you mean? Have you seen me?"

"You come on tip-toe. It is hardly walking."

Her eyes questioned me.

"I've seen you only a few times. But I suspect you come frequently."

"I am sure I don't, Mr. David Dale."

She came closer, her cheeks like crimson roses, her bright eyes angry, her lips scornful.

"You come to visit Joey, I think. You came the first night after your departure from Cedar

Dale. And you went into the cedar room." I smiled into her troubled face.

"And what did I do there?"

"You took the magpie's cage from its hook. You carried it away with you. But you were like a little trade rat—you left the cedar waxwing for Joey and me."

But just here Wanza flung me an odd look and ran into the house, saying over her shoulder: "That was a funny, funny dream."

Haidee favored me with a rather intent look, and dropped her gaze to the envelope in her hand. We walked around the cabin, and I explained how I planned to build a small rustic pergola with a trellis for wild honeysuckle at the back door to serve as a breakfast room next summer, and timidly at last, I told her that I wished that I might cover the rough walls of her sleeping room with cedar strips and build a pergola outside the door like the one I had built at Cedar Dale for Joey.

"We'll plant some woodbine roots this fall, and set out a crimson rambler. We may as well have the place blooming like an Eden," I said.

"And the wilderness shall blossom like the rose," murmured Haidee. "Thank you, Mr. Fixing Man."

I rode home happier than I had been in many

a long day. When I told Joey of the proposed improvements at Hidden Lake he shouted with glee, and a few moments later I heard him tooting on his neglected flute that had lain strangely mute since the day when Haidee had sung "Bell Brandon" to its accompaniment, and we had seen the smile die from her curling lips and the light of joy go out in her sparkling eyes.

After this my days were trances. Through the glowing flame-like hours I worked to transform the sordid little cabin into a fitting habitation for my wonder woman. Together we planned the rustic porch at the rear of the kitchen, and when the foundation was laid I dug up wild honeysuckle roots and we planted them with a lavish hand, bending shoulder to shoulder above the sweet, moist earth, our hands meeting, Haidee's breath on my face, her unsteady laughter in my ear, the charm of her rare, compelling personality stirring my senses to ecstasy.

I labored each day till the sun was well down behind Nigger Head; and then came a half hour of blissful idleness on the front porch with Haidee behind a tea tray facing me, Wanza handing around cheese cakes and sandwiches, and master Joey sitting on a three-legged stool, the picture of smug, well-fed complacency.

Wanza's conduct puzzled me sorely during these days. At times she jested with me in her old bright rollicking way, but oftener her mood was fitful, and she was hot-tempered, difficult and distrait.

One evening I rode to the village with her in her cart on a special errand for Haidee. It was a mellow, moonlight evening. The air was ripe with a frosted sweetness, a tang that only autumn evenings hold. I was in boisterous spirits; and as Wanza drove I relapsed into my old way of alternately bantering and teasing and flattering my companion.

"When you no longer line your umbrella with pink, Wanza," I said, "I will know that vanity and you have parted company."

The blonde head turned restlessly.

"I ain't half as vain as I used to be."

"Oh, that's bad, Wanza—very bad! A pretty girl is naturally vain. And as for the pink lining—it's as natural for a fair, pale girl like you to line her umbrella with pink as it is for a fruit dealer to stretch pink gauze over his sallow fruit."

"What do you mean by that?" Wanza demanded fiercely. She dropped the lines. "Now, what do you mean by that, I say?"

"Dear Wanza," I said, soothingly, "I don't

mean anything—except that pink lends a pretty glow to an alabaster skin like yours."

Her eyes gleamed at me savagely in the moonlight, and she made a strange sound in her throat that sounded like a sob.

"I don't understand," I continued, "why you're so sensitive, of late. Why, it's so hard to talk to you! You're so difficult I feel like putting on a mental dress-suit and kid gloves when I converse with you. What's come over you, Wanza?"

"Nothing's come over me. It's you," she answered in a low tone.

"Oh, no," I responded, "Wanza girl, I treat you just the same as I ever did, my dear!"

"But you don't treat me the same as you do her—you don't treat me just the same—" her voice sounded husky. She turned her head away.

What could I reply?

I ventured finally: "I don't know exactly what you mean, child! But I hope I show by my manner to you how very much you count in my life,—how dear you are to Joey and me—how fine and staunch a friend we have ever found you—I hope I show this, Wanza. If I do not I am sorry indeed."

There was a slight movement towards me on the girl's part. Her hand crept out shyly and touched mine. I heard her whisper chokingly:

"If I mean a good deal to you and Joey I sure ought to be satisfied. It oughtn't to matter—really matter—if you smile different when you speak to her."

I took her hand. I was moved. Again I marveled that Wanza had the power to shake me so. "You have your own place, child," I said. And when she questioned, "But what is my place, Mr. Dale?" I asked myself what indeed was her place. "I shall tell you some time," I answered, which was not at all the remark I desired to make, and I spoke in palpable confusion.

After a short interval she took her hand from mine, and gathered up the lines, not looking at me as she said: "Mr. Batterly is back in Roselake."

I caught her by the shoulder. I drew her quickly to me till I could see her face in the moonlight.

"When did he come back?" I asked, thickly.

She tugged at my restraining hand and shrugged away from me. "He's been back two weeks, I calculate—may be more."

"Don't speak to him, Wanza—don't look at him!" I implored quickly.

She faced me proudly at this. "Do you think I would," she cried scornfully, "except to answer him when he speaks to me on the road?"

"I did not know, Wanza," I murmured humbly.

"Did not know! It's little you know me any way, David Dale, I am thinking. If you know me so little as not to know that, why should I care indeed how you treat me, or what my place is with you? Why should I care? Sometimes I think, David Dale, I think that I hate you. I'm thinking it now. Yes, yes, yes!"

"Please, please, Wanza—"

"Stop! I will ask a few questions, myself. I will put them to you, although I never—in loyalty to you—put them to myself. But it is not for you to tell me how to behave—how to walk so and so—say and do so and so! This is the question I will put: Is it right for you to spend each and every day at Hidden Lake? Is it? Answer that to yourself—not to me—before you tell me not even to speak civilly to Mrs. Batterly's husband. I don't want to speak to him! I don't want him to speak to me! No,

nor look at me. Can you say as much for her, David Dale?"

"I don't know what to say," I stammered, taken by surprise.

"You don't have to say nothing—not to me. I'm not your judge. But answer the questions to yourself, quick, before you tell me what to do and what not, again! Go on, Rosebud, you're a-getting to be slower and slower!"

I glanced at her face. It was pale, and her lips were unsteady.

About this time Joey began to take sudden trips down the river in the flat-bottomed swift-water boat, poling away industriously each morning with a fine show of mystery—unconsciously admonishing me to appear indifferent and uninterested. I carried my apathy too far, I imagine, for one day he said to me:

"Mr. David, do you mind the old hollow stump in the willows on the river bank—where the flycatcher's left a funny big nest?"

I answered yes. I had marked it well. The secret water-way which led to Hidden Lake was close by.

"Well," Joey continued, looking very important, and puffing out his chest like a pouter

pigeon, "Bell Brandon and me have a post-office there. She leaves the most things for me there under the flycatcher's nest in a box—cut-out pictures, and cookies, and fludge."

"Fudge, Joey boy."

"Yes—fludge. And say, Mr. David—any time you're passing, look in, won't you? 'Cause there might be something there would spoil."

CHAPTER XIX

BEREFT

I HAD not heard from Janet Jones again and I was beginning to think that I might never have another letter from her when a missive came.

Thank you for my cedar chest (she wrote). It reached me safely, but I have been ill in body and mind and unable to write sooner. Oh, the joy my bit of cedar wood is to me. When I look at it, I am transported at once to the heart of the clean woods. And I shut my eyes and vision the tree hosts in their tawny brown, like Khaki-clad soldiers marshalling at the trumpet call of the rushing September winds. What a sparkle and spirited flavor there is in the wine-like air. How the leaves swirl in the paths like gilded cups, and winnow through the air like painted galleons, and rustle and unroll beneath the tread, like cloth of gold. Oh, I love the summer. But the fall with its shining sumptuous days—its melancholy grandeur surpasses it. Only—the birds are gone—are they not? And the dear clever nests—"half-way houses on the road to Heaven"—sway tenantless. While the wood aisles seem hushed and solemn, I know, like vast cathedral spaces after the organ has ceased to reverberate.

I read this letter with delight, and I wrote and thanked Janet Jones as cordially as I knew how for the pleasure it had given me. I began to look forward to her next missive, and I was beginning to experience no small satisfaction from our peculiar, unconventional friendship, when a strange thing happened.

Joey and I were tearing out the straw from his mattress one day, intent on our usual fall house-cleaning, when my fingers closed over a bit of cardboard. I drew it forth, unrolled it, and smoothed it in my hand. It was the small square visiting card that had been attached to the parcel that Haidee had placed in my saddle-bag for Joey, on the day that now seemed so long ago, when I had gone to fell the trees at Hidden Lake and had ridden so ungallantly away.

Joey sprang at me and seized my wrist. "That's mine! That's mine!" he shouted. "Give it here, Mr. David—please."

But I was staring at the writing on the back of the card. "For the boy who goes to Sunday school," Haidee had written in strong, clear characters. Surely, the hand that had penned that line had more recently penned other lines to me and beneath them signed the name of Janet Jones.

I had a letter in my pocket, and later I compared the writing on the envelope with that on Joey's card. And I smiled to myself; but wonderingly. Still a doubt assailed me. I grew wary. And fate favored me. When Wanza stopped her cart at the meadow bars en route to Roselake one day, to pick up Joey, I saddled Buttons and rode to the village in their wake. At the post-office I swung out of my saddle.

"Give me your letters, Wanza," I suggested. "Don't get down. I'll post them."

Once inside the office I ran the letters through my fingers. There were two letters addressed to Miss Janet Jones, Spokane, Washington, and the writing was that with which I had grown familiar in Janet Jones' letters to me.

I was completely mystified. I rode home in a brown study. And then suddenly I reached a solution. That night I wrote a letter. I took great pains with its construction. And after Joey was in bed I paddled away down the river in the light of the moon to the hollow stump among the willows on the bank. I placed my letter to Haidee within the recess on a soft bed of ferns and dried grass that I found there; and then I paddled stealthily home.

I kept an even face when I greeted Haidee the

following day, and she did not betray by word or glance that she had received a communication from me. But as I opened my lunch pail that night to give Joey some doughnuts that Wanza had sent him, there on top was a small white envelope addressed to me.

I read the letter after Joey was in bed and I had built up a fire of pine cones on the hearth. It was a characteristic Janet Jones letter:

Dear Mr. Craftsman:

Once upon a time—which is the way I begin my fairy tales to Joey—there was a certain foolish woman, whom we will call Haidee, who lived all alone in the heart of a forest. She was a very headstrong young woman, full of whims and insane impulses, or she never would have gone into the forest to live alone. But she loved Nature passionately and she had suffered and known heartache—and she felt that Nurse Nature could assuage pain.

A big-hearted woodsman lived near-by in this same forest. He swung his ax, and befriended her. He labored in the hot sun felling trees that the headstrong woman might be safe in her flimsy shack. But the woman taunted him, and when he would have felled every tree that endangered her habitation she stayed his hand. Then, one day, retribution overtook her. A tree fell, and she was hewn down in her conceit and foolhardiness. She was taken to the woodsman's cabin by the kind-hearted woodsman who rescued her. There

she was cared for tenderly, and the coals of fire burned her poor silly head—so much so that, knowing she was a burden and an expense to the woodsman, who, like most big-hearted honest woodsmen, was desperately poor, she lay awake nights planning how best to recompense him without wounding his proud spirit. At last, she thought of a plan. And with the connivance of a dear old-time friend in Spokane, carried it out. Her friend gave her permission to sign her name to the letters she wrote the woodsman. After the letters were written, they were sent to the original Janet Jones, who forthwith mailed them to the woodsman at Roselake. Janet Jones also, naturally, received the letters which the woodsman wrote, and in due time they were put into envelopes and addressed to the headstrong woman, whom they did not fail to reach. The cedar chest was the headstrong woman's gift to Janet Jones, who is an invalid, and a romanticist who enjoys beyond all words any departure from the commonplace.

Am I forgiven, Mr. Fixing-Man? And now, one word more. You will not receive another letter from Janet Jones. And—I pray you, come not too often to Hidden Lake—it is better so.

This was the missive which I read in the firelight. As I finished I suddenly felt bereft. And I lay back in my chair and stared into the coals with unseeing eyes, brooding miserably, groping in a misty sea of doubt and unrest and feeble desire. Then Joey called me in his sleep.

Just as I was sinking utterly, I heard, "Mr. David, Mr. David," and the cry of appeal braced me, strengthened the man in me. I went in to him as a sinner into a sanctuary, and the kiss he gave me sleepily was a salve that solaced and sustained me throughout the trying night.

I had finished the improvements on Haidee's cabin at this time; so I gave over going to Hidden Lake in prompt obedience to the request my wonder woman had made in her letter. But I wrote an answer to the letter and placed it in the old stump. I assured her that I would respect her wishes, and I begged her to let me know the instant I could serve her in any way, promising her that never a day should pass without my going to the secret post-office.

I had advertised my cedar chests in the magazines during the summer, and orders began to pour in, so that I was kept busy in my workshop. Those were busy days in the house as well, for, with the beginning of September, Joey had started to school at Roselake, and many of the small duties he had taken upon his young shoulders devolved upon me.

Oh, the day on which Joey started to school!

I dressed him carefully that morning, with all the trepidation of an over-fond parent, and I ad-

monished him concerning his demeanor in the school-room until I am sure his small head must have been in a whirl, and his little heart in a flutter of apprehension.

"I'll do my best, Mr. David, dear," he said bravely. "You said yourself they can't no one do more." He hesitated and looked at me, reddening painfully. "And if the teacher asks me who am I—and who's—who's my father—what am I to tell her?"

My hand closed on his shoulder fiercely. "Tell her you are Mr. Dale's boy, from Cedar Dale—tell her your name is Joey Dale," I cried. The look on his face had stabbed me.

He considered, looking into my eyes awesomely as I took his chin in my hand.

"If I have the Dale part, couldn't I have the David, too?" he suggested. "Hm! Then we'd be big David and little David."

"David Dale, the second," I said, poking him in the ribs.

"But there couldn't be any David Dale, the second. There couldn't never be but one real David Dale. But there could be a little David."

A little David!

That was a dragging day. I missed the lad which ever way I turned. And his words to me,

when he leaped to my arms from old Buttons' back that night! "It was fine! I liked it, really and truly. But, oh, Mr. David, I 'most knew you was lonely and missing me!"

Every morning I walked to the edge of the meadow, let down the bars for old Buttons, and watched Joey ride away, his sturdy little figure jouncing up and down in the saddle, his brave, bright face turned back to me over his shoulder, with rare affection beaming from big big brown eyes, as he waved and waved to me until a bend of the road hid him from my sight.

One memorable morning in the latter part of September, as I was tightening the saddle girths, he bent down to me, and as I lifted my head he surprised me with a quick shame-faced salute of moist lips on my forehead.

"You're a good Mr. David," he said patronizingly. "And I ain't yours either—not blood kin."

I hugged the little lad to me—a sudden fierce warmth of affection stirring my sluggish halting heart that had grown weary lately of life's complexities.

"You're my boy, just the same," I assured him.

"They can't anybody get me away from you—

can they?" he asked anxiously, and I saw genuine consternation in his eyes.

I laughed and hugged him tighter. "I guess not," I bragged. "Let them try. Jingles would eat them up."

"And we'd hide, wouldn't we?"

"We surely would."

"And—and we'd shoot at them from the rushes."

I know not why Joey's words should have irked me, but the day seemed long, and I was glad when I heard the soft thud of Buttons' hoofs on the turf outside the cabin promptly at the accustomed hour. I was building the kitchen fire, but I straightened up, stepped to the door, and threw it wide.

Buttons stood with his bridle over his head, his nose sniffing the ground, but no Joey sprang from the saddle into my eager arms. The horse was riderless.

All Roselake joined in the search for Joey, after I had ascertained that the lad was not with Haidee, and the search was prolonged far into the night. The school-master had seen Joey ride away at the close of school, and I argued that Buttons must have come straight home. At dawn the search was resumed. For miles in each

direction the searching party spread out, but at night, totally disheartened, the kindly neighbors disbanded, and Joey's case was left in the hands of the police.

CHAPTER XX

"PERHAPS I SHALL GO AWAY"

ALONE the next day I took up the search for Joey, beating back and forth between Roselake and Cedar Dale, and penetrating to Wallace and Wardner. It was to Wanza that I spoke my conviction at last, sitting my cayuse on the river road, while she sat stiff and tearful-eyed in her cart, pale even beneath the pink-lined umbrella.

"It looks to me, Wanza girl," I said wearily, "like a plain case of kidnapping."

"But who would kidnap him, Mr. Dale?" Wanza queried pitifully.

"Why—that's the question," I returned. "Have you ever seen him talking to any one—any stranger—when you have met him going and returning from school?"

She shook her head. "Once," she replied, "Joey was with me, and Mr. Batterly stopped us. He asked me all about Joey—seeming so keen! And I told him—thinking it no harm—just how

a dying woman gave him to you, saying he was a waif that had been picked up after a storm over on the Sound by her dead brother, who had been a fisherman."

"Where is Batterly now," I asked.

"Gone away—this week past."

"Oh, well," I sighed, "we'll acquit him. I'm sure he was not over fond of Joey." After a pause I asked brusquely: "Where has he gone?"

"I don't know—sure I don't, Mr. Dale. The last I heard of him he was going to hire a swift-water boat and a poler, and try the swift-water fishing above St. Joe."

"Then he hasn't left the country," I said. And my heart sank leaden and my hate of the man boiled up in my veins fiercely, as I pictured him still skulking about, a menace to Haidee's peace of mind.

The time went very heavily past. All my days and many nights were spent in the saddle, and the evenings that I passed at Cedar Dale were consumed in feverish plans for the scoutings that I made. I did not even now attempt to visit Haidee at Hidden Lake; but one morning, at sunrise, hearing a soft tap on my door, I opened to see Wanza standing there with a covered basket on her arm.

"I saw your light last night," she quavered. "I have brought you some good nourishing food. I can see you're not cooking for yourself. You're growing white and thin."

Her womanly act in coming thus to offer me comfort stirred me strangely, appealed to the finest fibre in my nature. Her simplicity, her self-forgetfulness made me falter at her feet.

But at last I gave over my scoutings. I made a cedar chest for Joey's room, and in this I placed all his little kickshaws, his few clothes, and his flute, along with the gay Indian blanket he had reveled in, and the quilt Wanza had pieced for him. The room thus became to me a sort of shrine. And finding me here at the close of a long day with tears of which I was not ashamed in my eyes, Wanza broke down and sobbed beside me.

"I'd like to kill whoever it is as has taken Joey away," she cried, brandishing a resentful fist.

"If we knew any one had taken him," I said, thoughtfully. "Sometimes I think—I think, Wanza, that Joey is dead."

"I don't think so! No, indeed!" Wanza returned with thrilling earnestness. "Oh, I feel

sure he ain't dead! He'll be found—some day. He sure will, Mr. Dale."

She helped me by her sturdy optimism.

Soon after this Wanza and I fell into the habit of tramping through the gleaming golden woods together almost daily, breathing the crisp sweet autumn air. Wanza in her bright sweater, with her tawny hair, and the carmine in her cheek flitted in and out of the wood paths like a forest dryad, exclaiming at every frost-touched leaf, and reveling in the painted glory about us.

"But the birds are gone," she said, a tear in her tones, as we looked into an empty king-bird's nest one day. "I love the king-birds—they're sleek dandies—that's what they are! Oh, Mr. Dale, what a heartache an empty nest gives me! The dear little birds are gone—"

"And Joey is not here," I ended sadly.

After awhile I went on: "Yes, summer has gone. It is the most evanescent time of the year. It slips and slips away—and just as you grasp it and thrill to its sweetness it melts into—this—as happiness merges into sorrow."

Her face quivered, and her eyes came to mine. "I guess that is so," she said in a low tone.

Looking in Wanza's face lately I always

turned away. I did so now. The look of questioning I found there—the mute appeal—the suffering—these unmanned me. But it grew to be a strange satisfaction to be with her, through long crisp daylight hours, in the hush of pink sunsets, in the gilded autumn twilights, while we rested after a meagre supper cooked over a camp fire, chatting desultorily, and watching the big pale stars came out to lie like white-tipped marguerites on the purple bosom of the sky above our heads.

One day I spoke my thought.

"I am thinking, Wanza—perhaps I shall go away."

We were in the heart of the woods. A tinkling, sly little brook made the forest musical, the rustle and purr of the pines sounded about us like fluty organ notes. Wanza's eyes were lifted to the sprightly shivering leaves of a cottonwood, and her face was very still. She did not move as I spoke, and I repeated my sentence.

"I thought you'd go," she said. She spoke harshly.

"I can't stop on here without Joey. I can't bear it," I said, haltingly.

"But I've got to stay on without either of you —and bear it."

I saw her eyes. I recoiled at the depth of pain revealed.

"Mr. Dale," she said gropingly, after a pause, "where are you going?"

"I don't know, Wanza. But inaction is intolerable. I must be doing something. I must get away for awhile, at least. It is better."

Wanza's eyes were very bright. Her hands that were smoothing a maple leaf were trembling. Her voice sounded dry and hard as she asked:

"When do you reckon you'll go?"

"Why, child, I do not know! Each day I say to myself I cannot bear another."

"It'll be the same wherever you are."

"Perhaps so, Wanza," I sighed. And then because I knew the tears were on her cheeks, I sprang to my feet, saying: "This may be our last day in the woods together, who knows? Come, let us try to forget—let us make the best of what we have."

Wanza rose. She came close to me. When our eyes met she gave a cry: "If you go you may never come back!"

"Never fear. I have no home but Cedar Dale," I replied, and I am afraid my voice was bitter. And when she put her hand on my arm I shook it off and would have strode away, but

again as in the woods on the occasion of our gipsying I saw her face close to my own, and caught my breath in marvel. No, there was never such a girl-face! Such an elf-face! I stooped suddenly and framed the face with my hands. What were her wonderful eyes saying, back of all the tears, all the mystery? Why—when I was in love with Haidee—did they draw me like a lodestar? Why now and then did she stir me in this strange fashion till I gazed and gazed, and needs must curb my will to keep from taking her in my arms and crushing her against my heart?

I had never faced the question. I did not care to face it now. I put it away for some future time, feeling vaguely that it remained to be reckoned with.

"I have no home but Cedar Dale," I repeated.

"And I am glad of that," she whispered.

She pressed nearer to me, and I released her face, and drew her slowly within the circle of my arms. But when I held her so, when the floating hair meshes were just beneath my chin, and her face brushed my sleeve, I steadied myself.

"Wanza," I said, "I am almost glad, too, that I have no other home. When I think of the good friends I have here—you and your father and

Father O'Shan—I realize that I am ungrateful to despise my humble place among you. Keep it for me, little girl, and I shall come back. Yes, I shall come back better equipped for the future among you. If it must be without Joey—" I hesitated and bit my lip—"without Joey," I continued more firmly, "I shall at least try to earn your respect by holding up my head, and forging on to some goal. I shall attain to something at last, I hope. And I hope I shall be able to serve my neighbors in many ways, and make myself needed in the community."

I held her for a moment after saying this, and then I bent down and for the first time in my life kissed her. But it was on the brow that I kissed her. And I am sure no brother could have saluted her more respectfully.

She drew back. Her head fell against my shoulder. I saw deep into her splendid eyes,—deep, deep. Back of all the tears and the smiles and the mystery I read at last what they were saying. I read—and I was humbled and abashed. I knew the truth at last. Wanza loved me.

I saw clearly now, indeed. I recalled Father O'Shan words: "Be careful in your dealings with that child." I had been blind, and a fool.

I blamed myself, and I hated myself. I stood stupidly staring into the face so near my own until with a sudden wrench Wanza jerked away from me, and ran on down the purpling wood-aisle before me, dashing the tears from her eyes as she fled.

I walked home slowly, astounded and perplexed by the revelation I had had.

CHAPTER XXI

FATE'S FINAL JAVELIN

THAT night in my lonely cabin I fell ill, and burned with fever, and shook with ague so that I was unable to drag myself about the cabin, but lay all the next day and the next in my bunk. The following day my fever left me magically; and late in the afternoon I arose, fed and curried my half-starved cayuse and, mounting, rode away beneath the berry-reddened yews to the trail that led to Haidee.

I dismounted at the rustic pergola at the rear of the cabin, tethered my cayuse and walked around to the front door. The door was closed, and a silence that was almost oppressive brooded over the place. I ran up the steps, and a curious premonition that Haidee had gone away sickened me as I rapped on the panel. Terrified at receiving no response, I turned the handle, pressed forward, and caught at the casement for support in my weakness. I peered in, and at the sight I saw my knees all but gave way so that I

swung about like a loose sail in a sudden breeze.

On the floor lay Randall Batterly in a ghastly pool of blood. His face was upturned to the cold October sunlight. His lips were opened in a half snarl, his full lids were wide apart over his rolled back, terrible eyes. He was bleeding from a wound in his chest. And Haidee stood above him, gazing down upon him, gray horror painted on her face.

She heard my step and turned, and I caught the metallic thud as the revolver she had been holding dropped to the bare floor. She stared at me, put out her hand as if to thrust me back. I saw fear in her face.

"It is you! It is you!" she breathed.

She continued to stare at me with big gaunt eyes.

"Yes," I replied, trying to keep the horror out of my tones. "It is I."

She shuddered and collapsed to her knees, clinging to the door frame as a drowning man clutches and grips a bulwark. The pupils of her eyes were dilated with terror and despair until the purple iris was eclipsed, and they stared black and empty as burnt-out worlds.

"He is dead—dead," she whispered. "He can't speak, or move."

I picked up the revolver and laid it on the table, and then I crossed to the rigid form on the floor. I knelt and pressed my ear to his heart. I lifted his hand; it fell back inertly. Yes, it was true. Randall Batterly was gone past recall, facing the great tribunal above, with who knew what black secret in his heart.

"We must get a physician," I murmured dully.

Haidee crept to my side. Her poor face was blanched and twisted till she looked like a half-dead thing.

"Who could have done this—" I stammered, in a voice that sounded driveling and uncertain in my own ears.

Again that dumb look of distress in her eyes, and she stood as if carved in granite.

"My dear—my dear, you must come away—this is too much for you," I continued hoarsely. I took her poor cold hands in mine. And then I turned and faced the door with a curious certainty that some one was looking at me, and I saw old Lundquist's rat eyes peering in on us from the doorway.

He said not one word—only stared and stared at the dead man on the floor, and at the abject living creatures standing over him; and then he

crept away like a sliding shadow, and the sunlight brightened the place again. But in that grim room Haidee had fallen face downward, stark and stiff, and her wild scream as she sank echoed and re-echoed in my ears for days.

I brought water, I bathed her face, I chafed her hands; but the moments passed and she did not revive, and twilight fell, as alone, in the presence of death I wrestled with the stupor that held her. And there they found me—the sheriff and old Lundquist.

"For God's sake, lend a hand here," I cried imploringly. And then I stood up. "Gentlemen," I said, "this—dead man is Mrs. Batterly's husband. I believe this to be a suicide—I found him lying just as you see him a short while ago. Mrs. Batterly had just discovered him, I believe. She is—as you see—in no condition to be questioned."

The sheriff hesitated. I had known the man for years, and I saw a swift scepticism darken his keen eyes as they searched my face. He glanced at Haidee and then at the revolver lying on the table. He reached over, picked up the weapon and examined it.

"This revolver is loaded in only four of its chambers. The fifth has a discharged cartridge.

Was this lying on the table when you came in, Dale?"

I spoke hoarsely. "I put it there. It had fallen to the floor."

Old Lundquist crawled closer. "That ban Mrs. Batterly's revolver," he mumbled, "I see her have it—it ban on the table most o' the time. Thar be a letter on it—to mark it like."

The sheriff's finger traced the outline of the shining letter on the polished surface of the weapon. He stood irresolutely, ruminating.

"Come!" I ordered brusquely. "This lady must be seen to." And as neither man made a move to assist me, I lifted Haidee in my arms. I felt her stir. Her eyes opened suddenly. She looked at old Lundquist and the sheriff, then up at me affrightedly. Her hand clutched my arm. She cowered, and a tremor shook her from head to foot.

"These men—why are they here?" she asked faintly.

"Gentlemen—" I was beginning, when the sheriff stopped me.

"Mrs. Batterly," he said, clearing his throat, and speaking raspingly, "this is your revolver?"

"Why, yes—" Haidee drew in her breath sharply—"why, yes," she admitted.

I felt her hand tighten its hold on my arm.

"It is mine, surely," she continued, as no one spoke. She looked from one to the other appealingly. "I am fond of shooting at a mark. I used it only this noon. I left it on the table after lunch when I went into the woods to sketch. I heard a shot fired soon after I left—but I thought nothing of it—rabbit hunters pass the cabin daily. When I came back to the cabin after a time I—I found my—husband on the floor, as you see him—" She halted, something in the eyes she saw fixed upon her caused her face to whiten. "Why," she stammered—"why—you don't think —think I—"

"Mrs. Batterly," the sheriff broke in quickly, "I arrest you for the murder of your husband, Randall Batterly."

I shall never forget the groping look she turned on me; the dumb appeal that struck to the center of my heart and set it quivering—the question in the big deep eyes, clear and pure as a rillet in the sun.

I don't know how I gave her into the sheriff's custody. I recall that my fists were doubled and that I mouthed useless imprecations, and that old Lundquist strove to reason with me, his lank arms wrapped about me restrainingly, as the sheriff

bore Haidee away in his gig. I recall climbing into my saddle and riding away, the echo of Haidee's parting injunction in my ears: "Find Wanza for me, please. She may be able to help me."

And I recall that old Lundquist stood shaking his fist after me in the pergola.

Little I cared for old Lundquist or the pummeling I gave him. I dug my heels into Buttons' sides. His hoofs fell with soft thuds on the fallen leaves that, imbedded in the damp soil, made a brown mosaic of my path. The bracing air was in my face, but I rode limp and flaccid, with cold beads of sweat upon my brow. "Oh, God," I groaned, "Oh, God! Oh, God!" But I could not pray. I only raised my eyes. Overhead the afterglow shot the sky with rose and silver, and an apricot moon was rising over the mountains hooded in white mist. I kept my eyes lifted as I rode on through the soft dusk to Roselake in quest of Wanza.

But Wanza was not at her father's house. When questioned Captain Grif said she had not been home since noon. He had supposed she was with Mrs. Batterly at Hidden Lake. I left a note for the girl to be given her as soon as she came in, saying nothing to old Grif of the tragedy

at Hidden Lake, and then, thoroughly disheartened, I took the road for Cedar Dale.

I made short work of reaching home. I put Buttons into a gallop, and rode like Tam o' Shanter through the night, whipped on by the witches of adversity. I reached the meadow. I rode through the stubble. The unlighted cabin seemed to exhale an almost inexorable malevolency as I came upon it. It greeted me—empty and pitiless. Even my cupboard was bare.

Toward midnight, unable to breathe the atmosphere of the cabin, racked with despair, and agog with restlessness, I stole out, clumsy footed, to the willows on the river bank. Here I found my canoe. I slid it into the water, stepped in and paddled away, seeking surcease from my thoughts beneath the tent of night.

The friendly current bore me on. Soon I came opposite the old cottonwood stump, gleaming white among the shadows. I laid aside my paddle and drifted along close to the high willow-bordered banks, the cold, clear stars above me. The silence and the motion of the canoe were soporific. I was weak and worn from my recent illness. My head kept nodding. I closed my eyes. After a time I slept.

The hoot-hoot of an owl awakened me. I

raised my head and looked about me. The darkness had deepened. The stars had a redder glow and the mountains stood up like invincible agate gates against the black sky, shutting in this little bit of the great world. The night air was cold. I shivered and jerked my arms mightily to induce circulation. And then hunger assailed me and I began to think of food.

I took my paddle and swung my canoe about. Suddenly, as one remembers a feast when hard pressed for sustenance, I recalled the doughnuts and goodies that Haidee had been wont to place in the hollow stump for Joey. Well, I knew the cache was empty now.

I reached the stump. I thrust my hand gropingly within the recess, smiling whimsically at my fatuous impulse. My fingers encountered a small object, smooth and heavy to the touch. I drew it forth. It was a six-chambered revolver, loaded in five of its chambers. The sixth chamber contained a discharged cartridge.

A tremor ran over me. Slow horror chilled my veins. I sickened as my fingers passed over the cold polished surface, recalling the livid face of the dead man in the cabin. Mechanically, at last, I slipped the weapon into my pocket and took up the paddle.

I slept no more that night. The next morning with an attorney I visited Haidee in her cell in the village jail. My poor friend was stricken. Her pallor was marked, and her great soft eyes held the pitiful appeal of a hunted deer. She told the attorney her story straight. A tear rolled down her cheek, and she faced me with the question, barely voiced:

"You believe in my innocence?"

And I, shaken and undone, could only cry: "Believe in you? Oh, my child—do I believe in myself? I know you are innocent."

I produced the revolver I had found in the hollow stump, and the attorney pounced on it eagerly. 'Here is the evidence, indeed," he said, thoughtfully. "I think we shall prove that the bullet that killed Randall Batterly was fired from this very weapon. Mrs. Batterly's revolver is of a different caliber."

As I left the jail I met Captain Grif. He plucked at my sleeve. His face worked. "Wanza ain't come home yet, Mr. Dale," he quavered.

I was startled. "That is strange," I said.

"She's always stayed to Hidden Lake nights. I warn't surprised when she didn't s-show up last night thinkin' she'd gone peddlin' in the after-

noon, and then gone on to Hidden Lake about the time you was askin' for her, may be. But I jest heard about Mrs. Batterly bein' arrested yesterday." His voice broke. "For God's sake, Mr. Dale, w-where can Wanza be?"

"Where can she be?" I echoed to myself.

Two days passed. Wanza did not return. To find her became my chief object in life, but all my inquiries were fruitless. And then on the third day, Captain Grif came to Cedar Dale.

"I been thinkin' that Wanza may be with Sister Veronica at the old Mission near De Smet," he quavered, tears standing in his poor dim eyes.

"Have you seen Father O'Shan?" I asked quickly.

He shook his head. "Not for days, Mr. Dale, for God's sake f-find my gal! F-find her, my boy, find her! The Mission's the place to look for her. Why, when Wanza was a little girl, and we l-lived at Blue Lake, she used to run to Sister Veronica with everything, jest l-like a child to its mother."

Acting on this information I set out post-haste that very morning for the old Mission. The stage had passed an hour before, Buttons had fallen lame, but I was in a desperate mood and

would brook no delay. The current was with me, and I slid down the river seven miles and made a portage to Blue Lake before noon. A creek flows into Blue Lake, and I followed the creek to its head. It was well past the noon hour by then, and I secreted my craft in a tangle of birches and struck across country on foot. I had a map in my pocket and a compass, and I went forward hopefully.

The old Mission stands on an elevation overlooking a pastoral valley. Gray and solitary it looms, a gilded cross shining on its blue dome. But the way to it, unless one follows the main traveled road, I found to be as hard as the narrow path that leads to righteousness. Ever and anon I glimpsed the gilded cross between the pine tops, but I floundered on through thickets, waded streams, and beat about in bosky jungles, without striking the road I sought.

Toward evening when I lifted my eyes, the shining cross had eluded me. It had comforted me to have it set like a sign against the sky. But I kept on doggedly. The thoughts that went with me were long, hard thoughts. It seemed to me that through all my unfortunate life I had been faring on to meet this final javelin of fate—to have the woman I adored held in the leash of

the law—to realize my helplessness—to suffer a thousand deaths a day in my impotency—this was the denouement prepared for me—awaiting me —when, as a lad of twenty-four, I had accepted the stigma of a crime of which I was not guilty and hidden away as a guilty man may hide! The only green oasis in the arid waste of my life had been Joey, and suddenly my heart cried out for the lad who had been my solace and delight. I dropped down on a log, and lay supine through long moments. I thought of Wanza and hoped and prayed I might find her. Haidee's face came before me with its look of pure white courage. I opened the book of my life still wider and turned to earlier pages. I grew bitter and morose. But, gradually, as I lay there, the searing hurts and perplexities and injustices sank back into the hush of my soul's twilight, and I tore out the blurred pages and treasured only the white ones on which the names of Joey and Wanza and Haidee were written. Hope stirred in my heart.

It was sunset when I roused at last, crawled to a nearby stream that came slipping along with endless song, and drank thirstily, and laved my face. As I knelt, I saw what seemed to be a deserted cabin, half hidden among scrub pines in the

draw below me. I hailed it, stumbled down the overgrown trail, and approached it.

The door was closed, the solitary window boarded over. I tried the door, found it fast, and rattled it tentatively. A voice cried: "Who is there?"

My heart gave a violent leap.

I pressed against the door, and swallowed hard before I could control my tones.

"It is a—a man who is in need of food and shelter," I answered.

"It is Mr. David! Mr. David!" the voice shrieked. And such a lusty shout arose that the rafters of the old shack fairly trembled.

As for me I leaned in dazed suspense against the door, impatiently waiting for my lad to open to me.

"Mr. David—dear, dear Mr. David—I can't open the door! He's taken the key." I heard then.

"Who has taken the key, Joey?"

"The big man. He locked me in. Mr. David —can't you get me out?"

I placed my shoulder against the door. With all my strength I gave heave after heave until the rotten old boards gave way. They splintered into fragments, and through the jagged opening

crept Joey, my lad—to throw himself into my arms and cling and cling about my neck, biting his lips to keep the tears from falling. But my tears wet the boyish head I pressed against my breast. I sank to my knees and gathered him into my arms, and rocked back and forth, crooning over him, womanishly:

"Joey—Joey! Little lad—dear little lad!"

Soon after I lay in the bunk in the interior of the one-room shack and Joey cooked a substantial meal for me; and when it was ready, I ate ravenously while he hung over me, his hand stealing up to close about my hand from time to time.

When I had finished I dropped back into the bunk. "Now then, lad," I said.

And Joey began his tale by asking: "Mr. David, am I the big man's boy?"

"What do you mean, Joey?"

"He says I'm his boy. He says I was lost in a shipwreck—when I was a teenty baby."

I covered my face with my hand. "Go on," I bade him, hoarsely.

"One day he saw the mark on my chest. I'd been fightin' at school, Mr. David—and coming home I was crying and sorry, and Wanza, she came along, in her cart, and she washed my face and neck and tidied me. The big man came up

—and said: 'Good day, young man?' And when he saw the funny red mark on my chest he asked Wanza, 'Who is this boy?' And Wanza, she told him how you took me just a three year old when a woman a few miles down river died, and how the woman got me over on the Sound of her brother who was a fisherman and had picked me up on the beach one time after a storm. The big man kept asking questions and questions, and Wanza told him the woman's brother was dead, too. And, at last, Wanza got tired of talking and she just said: 'Good day, Mr. Batterly,' and told me to get in the cart, and we drove off."

Joey paused and his soft eyes flashed. I was too greatly overcome to make any comment, and I lay back, feeling that my world was crashing in chaos about my head. After awhile the lad continued:

"That day when he—he stole me, Mr. David, I was coming home from school along the river road. He stopped me and he said he was my father and I must go with him. 'Get off your horse,' he said. I got off Buttons, but I said: 'No, I'll not go with you. I'll ask Mr. David, first!' The big man laughed and said you'd find out soon enough. I kicked and kicked, Mr. David, when he grabbed me by the arm. And

then another big man came out of the bushes, and they tied up my mouth and they carried me to a boat and locked me up in a funny little cupboard. By and by I went to sleep. Then one morning I woke up and I was here. I heard the big man say to the other man: 'I've got him, Bill. My wife'll have to come to terms now.' "

Again Joey paused, and I writhed and was silent. Joey looked at me commiseratingly and went on:

" 'Most a week ago he told me he was going to fetch Bell Brandon. 'You be a good boy,' he said, 'and I'll bring her.' And he went away; but he locked the door, 'cause he said he couldn't trust me. I 'most knew you'd come, Mr. David! The minute you knocked I knew you'd come for me. And I'm going away with you—and you'll punish the big man, won't you? And I'm not his boy, am I, Mr. David?"

"If you are his boy," I said huskily, "you belong to Bell Brandon, too." And with my words a terrible blinding despair swept over me. I was too steeped in lassitude and despondency to reason, too greatly fatigued to wonder. I closed my eyes and turned my face to the wall.

After awhile a blanket was drawn carefully over me. I felt a warm breath on my face. My

eyes opened straight into Joey's, and I reached out and took his hand in mine. "Joey," I whispered, seeing shining drops on his cheeks, "Joey, I'm in trouble. I must think, lad! The big man won't be back, lad—he'll not return at all—I know that—you will never see him again. But after awhile you and Bell Brandon will be very happy together—after awhile."

"What do you mean, Mr. David? Ain't I going to live at Cedar Dale again, with you, and Jingles and Buttons, same as ever? Oh, ain't I, Mr. David?" my little lad cried out, and his tears fell fast.

I slept that night with Joey at my side in the narrow bunk, and I awoke at intervals, and stared out through the glimmering casement at the moon-silvered trees. Weary as I was, my cogitations kept me from repose. I promised myself that I would push on to the Mission in the morning. Joey should go with me, and the stage should bear us back to Roselake, although this would necessitate a delay. I moved, and Joey's hand fluttered out toward me in his sleep. He whispered my name.

I slept again, waking to see the curtain at the window I had opened, pushed aside, and a face peering in at me in the cold gray light of morning.

It was withdrawn and a hand fell on the door. I looked down at Joey's tousled head pillowed on my arm. Laying him gently down on the pillow, I arose and took my revolver from my pocket.

"What do you want?" I demanded, throwing open the door.

The man standing there put out his hand quickly. It was Father O'Shan.

"You have come from the Mission?" I gasped.

"Yes."

"Can you give me news of Wanza, then? Is she at the Mission?"

He took the revolver from my grasp, looked at me curiously, and placed his hand on my shoulder.

"Yesterday, when I passed here, I thought I heard a child sobbing. I was too greatly overwrought at the time to attach importance to it. In the night I recalled the boarded over window and I could not rest. I came to investigate."

He hesitated. I waited, and he came a step closer.

"David Dale," he said, with evident reluctance, "Wanza Lyttle has confessed to being implicated in the murder of Randall Batterly. I took her to Roselake myself yesterday. She has given

herself up. Mrs. Batterly was set at liberty a few hours later."

I reeled, and sat down weakly on the steps. "Not Wanza! Not Wanza!" I kept repeating over and over.

Something gripped me by the throat, tears in my eyes smarted them. I clasped my head with my arms, hiding my face. I felt drowning in deep currents. That brave girl—insouciant, cheery, helpful Wanza! What had she to do with the murder of Randall Batterly?

CHAPTER XXII

RENUNCIATION

JOEY and I slept that night at Cedar Dale, and the next morning as early as might be I obtained permission to visit Wanza in the village jail. We looked into each other's eyes for a beating moment, and then I had her hands in mine and was whispering, "Courage, courage, Wanza."

The color surged into her white cheeks, and her eyes blazed.

"Do you think I did it, David Dale?" she whispered painfully.

"Wanza—child—what sort of confession have you made?"

"I told them I was the only one who knew anything about it. I told them it was a shot from my revolver that killed Mr. Batterly. They showed me the revolver Mrs. Batterly's attorney had, that you found in the hollow stump, and I swore it was mine. And so they put me in here to wait for a trial. But they let her go. It was on her

account that I told what I did. I never said I killed him—never!"

"My poor, poor, girl!"

"Hush! Please don't! Don't say a word! Oh, I don't want to break down—I been through a lot—a lot! I'll tell you all now—all, Mr. Dale! It was like this. That day at Hidden Lake Randall Batterly found me there alone. He was drunk—very drunk. I had just come in and I thought Mrs. Batterly had gone to Roselake as she had intended. I told him so when he asked for her. And—when he thought there was no one about he began saying all sorts of silly things. Truly, Mr. Dale, I had never spoken to him but just three times in the village—just to be civil. But he said some downright disgusting things that day, and he put his arms around me, and he held me tight, and he—he kissed me twice—oh, so fierce like! though I struck him hard. I got frightened. I saw he was so drunk he could scarcely stand. Mrs. Batterly's revolver was lying on the table. I motioned to it. 'Don't touch me again, Mr. Batterly,' I screamed, 'or I'll shoot myself.' I think I was almost out of my head with fright. I turned to run from the room when he caught my arm. I had my own revolver in the pocket of my sweater coat, and I pulled it out

quick as a flash. 'Come,' he said, looking ugly, 'give me that revolver! Give it here! Don't be a fool.' We had a scuffle and he had just wrenched the revolver away from me, when, oh, Mr. Dale, it slipped from his hands and struck the floor hard, and went off. He had been grinning at me because he had got the revolver in his own hands, and he stood there still grinning for a second—oh, an awful second—and then he just crumpled up and dropped on the floor at my feet, dead, dead, dead!"

It was impossible for Wanza to go on for a moment or two. And when she continued, at length, after a paroxysm of sobbing, my arm was around her, and her poor drooping head was against my shoulder.

"When I saw that he was dead, Mr. Dale, I picked up my revolver, and I ran as fast as I could out of the cabin and hid in the underbrush by the lake. By and by I spied Mrs. Batterly's canoe, and I got in and paddled away as fast as I could. I remembered the hollow stump, because I'd gone there for Mrs. Batterly with fudge for Joey; and when I saw it I just popped the revolver inside. Then I hid the canoe among the willows and started to walk to Roselake. I kept to the woods along the river road until I heard the

stage coming, and then I thought 'I'll go to Sister Veronica at the Old Mission.' And I ran out and hailed it, and got in. When the stage got to De Smet that evening a man got in, and I heard him tell the driver that Mrs. Batterly had been arrested for the murder of her husband. So then I knew I had to tell the truth and take the blame or they'd keep her in jail and drag her through an awful trial, and I knew what that would mean to you, Mr. Dale."

I pressed her head closer against my shoulder. "Wanza," I said, "you are a noble girl."

The tears welled up in the corn-flower blue eyes.

"Oh, Mr. Dale, you do believe that Mr. Batterly was most respectful to me whenever I met him in the village! He was very polite and respectful. I never spoke to him but three times. Once dad was with me, and once Joey, and once I was alone."

There was something piteous in her asseveration.

"I am sure he was respectful, child."

"I wanted to die the minute he spoke too bold to me when he found me there alone at Hidden Lake."

"I well know that, Wanza."

"Marna of the quick disdain,
Starting at the dream of stain!"

I cleared my throat and spoke as hopefully as I could. "Let us forget as well as we can, little girl. Let us look forward to your release. You will tell the truth at the trial, and you will be believed. And then—you will forget—you will start all over again! You must let me help you, Wanza, in many ways. I have a piece of good news for you even now. I have found Joey."

But I did not tell her Joey's story, until my next visit.

I learned from Haidee's attorney that Randall Batterly had been buried in Roselake cemetery, and that Mrs. Olds had been sent for and was staying with Haidee. That afternoon Buttons carried a double burden over the trail to Hidden Lake. I went in alone to Haidee, leaving Joey in the woods. My heart was too overcharged for free speech, but I told Haidee that I had found Joey in an abandoned cabin and I told her all that Wanza had told me of the part she had played in the accidental shooting of Randall Batterly, and later I said to her:

"I have something strange to communicate to you. But first, I am going to ask you if you will

tell me the story of your life after you became Randall Batterly's wife."

Haidee lifted her head at my request and straightened her shoulders with an indrawn spasmodic breath. "I have always intended to tell you my story, some day," she answered. Lines of pain etched themselves upon her brow.

"I think if you will tell me you will not regret it," I replied.

"I have always intended to tell you," she repeated. Her voice shook but she lifted brave eyes to mine, and began her story.

"I married Randall Batterly eight years ago, when I was eighteen, soon after my father died. He took me to Alaska, and—and Baby was born there. When my little one was two years old, I had a very severe attack of pneumonia. While I was still ill Mr. Batterly was obliged to make a trip to Seattle, and it was decided that Baby was to go with him, and be left with my mother there until I was stronger,—I think the good nurse I had scarcely expected me to recover. Mr. Batterly had always been a drinking man, though I was unaware of this when I married him. On the steamer he drank so heavily that he was in his stateroom in a drunken stupor most of the time, he afterwards confessed. Then—there was a

storm and a collision in the night—and the ship Mr. Batterly was on went down off Cape Flattery. Mr. Batterly was rescued by a man who shared his stateroom—a man he had known for years. But my little boy—my Baby—was never seen again."

In the silence that followed, Haidee shuddered and closed her eyes, biting her lips that were writhing and gray. After a short interval she went on in a low, strained tone:

"Mr. Batterly and I parted soon after. My mother died that summer and I went to Paris to study art. While in Paris last winter, in a Seattle paper, I read of Mr. Batterly's death at Nome. His name was probably confused with that of his partner. I did not know he had a partner. This spring I returned to America, and with a sudden longing for the West I came out to visit Janet Jones in Spokane. It was then I was obsessed with the desire to paint this beautiful river country. Janet Jones aided and abetted me. I purchased a riding horse and went to board on a ranch near Kingman. It was deadly. When I walked into your workshop I had ridden all day, fully determined to find a habitation of my own."

I had glanced at Haidee once or twice to find

that her eyes were still closed. But now, as she finished, she opened them wide, and at the look of misery I saw in them I cried out quickly:

"Don't tell me any more—please—please—"

"There is nothing more to tell," she answered dully.

"Thank you for your confidence. Before I told you all I have to tell I thought it best to ask it of you."

"You have something to tell me? For you things are righting—you have found your boy! For me everything seems wrong in the world—everything! But now—may I see Joey, please, before long?"

"Mrs. Batterly," I asked, "may I tell you Joey's short history?"

At my abrupt tone she turned her eyes to mine, wonderingly. "Surely," she replied.

"It is a pitifully meagre one. I found him sobbing on the doorstep of a humble cabin, one night, four years ago last June. I took him in my arms and entered the place, to find within a dying woman. She told me that the child was a waif, picked up on the beach after a storm on Puget Sound, by her brother, who was a fisherman, a year before. Her brother had died six months previous and she had taken the child.

The woman passed away that night, and I carried the child home. Mrs. Batterly, your husband gleaned this story from Wanza. He took Joey and secreted him in a cabin, thinking the lad his child and yours—"

Haidee broke in on my recital with a gasping cry: "My child—mine?"

"Mrs. Batterly, was there a mark on your baby's chest—a mark you could identify him by?"

"Yes, yes!—a bright red mark—oh, not large—the size of a quarter—just over his heart."

"Joey has such a mark, though it is a mark considerably larger than a quarter—and it is higher than his heart."

A doubt that I was ashamed of stirred my breast, seeing the eagerness on the face before me. A doubt that returned later during forlorn hard days to haunt me. I said to myself that I knew not even on what shore of the great Sound Joey was discovered. But Haidee was speaking impetuously:

"He has grown—the mark has grown too, and is higher up! I have a scar on my forehead almost hidden by my hair that was much lower down when I was a child." She rose, her face working, her whole slight figure quivering. "Oh, Mr. Dale, give me my child!"

I went to the door and gave my whistle and Joey responded. Haidee took him in her arms, and he told his story to her much as he had told it to me. But when he finished, he looked up in her face questioningly:

"I won't have to leave Mr. David, will I?" he queried. "He's my only really, truly daddy. He'd be terrible lonesome without me. Why, I most guess he couldn't get along without me, Bell Brandon!"

"Dear, dear little boy, don't you understand? You have a mother, now." Haidee's arms held him close. Her cheek rested against his. Looking at her I hated myself for the pang I felt.

And so my little lad went out of my keeping. I left him with Haidee and went back to take up my niggardly existence at Cedar Dale.

Anxious days ensued. My heart was heavy with thoughts of Wanza. I could not eat nor sleep. And every day Griffith Lyttle and I consulted together, and held wearing conclaves in the office of Wanza's attorney. And some way I found myself distrait and unnatural in Haidee's presence and consumed with bitter melancholy when alone.

What had come over me? When I was with Haidee all my speech was of Wanza. When I

was alone all my thoughts were of her. Haidee was free—but I realized this but dimly. The thought of Wanza's position was paramount. In the long night vigils I saw her face. I recalled the look I had surprised on it once—the secret never intended for my reading—and my compassion and wonder overpowered me. That Wanza should care for me!—I felt like falling on my knees in humbleness.

My loneliness was intense. I began to realize that Joey had gone out of my life—that his place was henceforth not with me—never with me again.

The love of a man for a small boy is composed of various ingredients, it has spice in it, and tenderness, and pride, and hope, and fellowship—and a lilt of melody goes through it that lightens the most rigid days of discipline. So when the small boy goes out of the home, the man is bereft of joy and inspiration and companionship. At first I went daily to Hidden Lake, and Joey came daily to Cedar Dale. But one day when Joey was begging me to make him a bow gun I surprised a wistful gleam in Haidee's soft eyes. She drew the lad into her arms.

"Mother will buy you a wonderful gun," she promised.

"But I'd rather have Mr. David make it, Bell Brandon. I guess women don't know what boys like—just."

The hurt look in the purple-black eyes went to my heart. After that I went not so often to Hidden Lake.

I took to using Joey's room as a sort of study. I fitted up a desk near the window, and here I wrote on my novel, and wrought at wood carving for the Christmas trade. Finding me here one day carving a frame for an old photograph of Wanza, Haidee looked at me oddly, turned swiftly and went from the room, while Joey stared eagerly, and whispered:

"Oh, Mr. David, some day I'm coming back to stay in my dear old room. Tain't nice at Bell Brandon's for a boy. They's a white spread on the bed, and blue ribbons to tie back the curtains. And when the coyotes holler Bell Brandon's frightened too."

Later on the porch at parting, Haidee said to me:

"Have you worked long on the frame you are carving for Wanza's picture?"

"Since—oh, I began it about the time Joey was lost," I answered.

She looked at me curiously.

"Wanza is very lovely in that picture."

"She is. She is growing more beautiful every day," I answered thoughtfully; "her soul shines in her face. I realize each time I see her how her character is rounding—how sturdy and fine she is in her trouble."

After Haidee had gone I recalled the look she had flung at me as she turned and went down the steps, saying:

"Wanza is very fortunate to have you for a friend, very fortunate indeed."

I asked myself what her look had meant.

Another week passed. I finished my novel. And one day soon after I rode to Roselake, expressed the manuscript to a publishing firm, and rode homeward feeling that my affairs were on the knees of the gods.

Not far from Cedar Dale I left the road and took the trail that led through the woods. In the woods I dismounted and went forward slowly, my horse's bridle on my arm. It was a gray day, lightened by a yellow haze. I was enraptured with the peculiar light that came through the trees. The foliage about me was copper and flame. Presently I heard voices, and looking through the trees I saw Haidee and Joey. They were kneeling in a little open space, gathering

pine cones. Haidee was bareheaded and her sleeves were rolled back, exposing her round, white arms. Her figure was lithe and supple as she knelt there, her drooping face full of witchery and charm.

I had an opportunity to observe Joey well. His face was thinner, his carriage not so gallant as formerly. There was less buoyancy in his voice. Something sprightly was missing in his whole aspect,—a certain confidence and dare. He was not the Cedar Dale elf I had known. What had changed him so?

I went forward and Joey cried out and hurled himself into my arms. Haidee stood up and drew the lad to her with a nervous motion.

"Joey," I said, "run away and see what Jingles is barking at so furiously. A fat rabbit has just escaped him."

Joey bounded away shrieking with excitement. I studied Haidee deliberately as her eyes followed the childish figure. Her eyes were brooding and solemn and sweet as she watched, but there was a shadow on her brow.

"Too bad," I said speaking out my thought, "for Joey's mother to be jealous of me."

"Do you think that of me?" she faltered.

"He is all yours—no one on the face of the

earth has the slightest claim on him excepting yourself."

Our eyes met; hers were startled yet defiant; and I am afraid mine were a trifle accusing.

"Do not speak to me like this—do not dare!" Then suddenly she softened. "But you are right—perhaps. When I think of the days and months you had him and I was bereft—when I think how much you mean to him—more than I mean—oh, it hurts! I am a wretch."

"No, no," I said hastily. "I did not understand, that is all."

"You have not understood—and it has altered your manner to me, that is it, is it not? You have thought me weak, and selfish, and ungrateful. Well, I am not ungrateful; but I have been selfish. I have thought not enough of you and Joey. But now I have confessed, and I shall be more considerate." Her hand came out to me. "Let us shake hands." Tears were in her eyes.

I took her hand with shame and contrition. I reached home utterly miserable. Had Haidee changed or had I changed? What had come over us? The spontaneity and warmth had seeped from our friendship. There seemed to be a shadow between us that each was futile to lift.

I said to myself that when I heard from my

novel—if the word was favorable—I should go to her—I could at least tell her of my hopes for the future—I could lay my love at her feet. All should be made plain; the cloud should be dispersed.

And so the weeks went past.

CHAPTER XXIII

WHEN CHRISTMAS CAME

ONE day close on to Christmas, Wanza was tried for the murder of Randall Batterly, and after a record-breaking trial that lasted but five hours, acquitted. The verdict said that Randall Batterly was killed by the accidental discharge of a revolver dropped by his own hand.

In the twilight of that strange day I drove Wanza to her home, where old Grif Lyttle awaited her. It was a gray twilight, the snow was drifted into gleaming heaps on either side of the road, the river crawled darkly along between its fleecy banks. We found no words to say at first, but when I heard a sob in Wanza's throat I turned and put my arm across her shoulders.

"There, there, Wanza!" I whispered, soothingly.

She wept quietly. Presently she said, between smiles and tears:

"It will soon be Christmas. I will try to give father a good Christmas, Mr. Dale."

"There, there, Wanza," I said, again.

She drew away, and with both hands pushed back the hood that she had drawn over her face on leaving the jail.

"Mrs. Batterly wants to send me away, soon after Christmas—away back East to school—where I can forget," she faltered.

Her blue eyes widened to great round wells of misery, the tears rained down her altered cheeks.

"You will forget," I soothed her; "it was an accident, my dear."

"Oh, but Mr. Dale, I *felt* that I could kill him—for being so disrespectful to me—for speaking so bold—for kissing me! I had murder in my heart! I remember one night in the woods when we were gipsying—do you mind it, Mr. Dale?—you took my hands, and I thought you was going to kiss me, you looked at me so long, but you didn't—you respected me too much! Why if you had 'a kissed me—not loving me—Mr. Dale, it would 'a killed me. And I think I could almost 'a killed you."

I looked into her face, and suddenly I was back again in the wind-stirred forest with the black elf-locks of a gipsy wench brushing my lips,

her hands held close, her eyes, burningly blue, lifted to mine in the firelight. I heard her voice whispering: "If I was a gipsy, and you was a gipsy things would be different." I recalled the words of the song I had sung:

"Marna of the wind's will,
Daughter of the sea—"

I sighed. Marna of the wind's will, indeed!

This conversation left a sore spot in my heart. I was dejected and miserable for days. The day before Christmas arrived and late in the afternoon I rode into Roselake. I purchased some bolts for a sled I was making for Joey, got my mail, and returned home at dusk.

I built a fire at once in the fireplace in the front room, and went over my mail eagerly by the light of my green-shaded lamp. One envelope bore the New York postmark, and I opened it with nervous fingers. I read the communication it contained, and sat, a warm, surging joy transfusing my whole being. The publishing firm in New York had accepted my novel for publication, and the terms mentioned were generous beyond my wildest visionings.

There was another communication that I read over and over; and as I read I knew that I was

free at last—yes, free for ever—free to ask any woman in the world to be my wife; I knew that the search light of justice could be turned on a folded page of my past that had long been hidden, and that there would be no tarnish on the page. For the letter said that my poor old father was dead, and in dying had confessed to a forgery committed eight years ago—a crime which his son had tacitly admitted himself to be guilty of when he had stolen away under cover of the night and disappeared, rather than face an investigation.

The daily papers had blazoned abroad the shooting of Randall Batterly, and the subsequent trial of Wanza Lyttle, and my name had appeared in the account, the writer who was my father's lawyer explained. A letter to the postmaster at Roselake had resulted in further establishing my identity.

The writer had the honor to inform me that my father had left a snug little fortune—the result of some recent fortunate mining ventures—that would accrue to me, and he begged me to come back to my southern home and take my rightful place among the people. I shook my head at this. Who was there in the old home who would welcome me? My mother was long since dead—

my father gone. There was no one belonging to me left in the old place. It would be more strange and forlorn than an entirely new community. I should like to visit it again. But that was all.

I dropped the letter to the floor, and sat thinking of Haidee. And as I thought I smiled tenderly. After a time I decided that Haidee should see these important letters—that I should go to her. And on a sudden impulse I rose up.

As I opened the door the snow was falling, and there was a ring around the moon. I left the door open and stepped back into the house, going to the cedar room to get my sweater. When I returned, a woman with snow-powdered hair was stepping hesitatingly across the threshold. Haidee!

"It is you! Out so late—alone!" I began. "And in this storm."

But the big eyes only smiled at me, and she stood there like a beautiful wraith in her long gray cloak.

"Let me take your cloak," I said.

I went to her, and she put both hands on my shoulders impulsively.

"I haven't thought of the weather. Ever since I saw you last I've thought of you,—and thought,

and thought. It's Christmas Eve, you know. I have come to wish you a Merry Christmas, and I have brought you a Christmas gift—one to keep till spring, at least."

"Come to the fire," I urged.

She sat down and I sat down opposite her. The firelight caressed her, played in her eyes, ruddied her cheeks that were glowing from her walk through the wintry air.

"In all the time I have known you this is the first time I have ever shared your fire," she whispered.

There was a silence. I could hear my heartbeats. How fine of her to come to me in this womanly fashion! I sat and watched her. A lock of hair had fallen over her ivory brow. She had dropped her head forward on to her hand, and her dewy lips were parted. I stooped closer, closer still. A tear slipped down on her smooth cheek and glistened in the firelight as I gazed. She turned her face away.

"What gift have you brought me?" I whispered.

There was a movement in the shadows beyond the circle of light cast by the green-shaded lamp —a rustle and a stir—then a swift hurtling of a small lithe figure across the open space—a pause

—a swooping, frantic clutch of young strong arms about my neck, and Joey, all wet and steaming in his snowy coat, had me fast, shouting in my ear, over and over again:

"I'm your Christmas gift, Mr. David! I'm your Christmas gift."

He was in my arms, and Haidee had drawn back and was smiling at me, her eyes like great luminous pools of fire.

"What a wonderful, wonderful present," I responded shakily. "Now, who could have sent me this very best present in the world?"

"Bell Brandon," shrieked my little lad. "She did not send me—she brought me."

"Then—she must have another gift for me," I said boldly, and held out my hand to Haidee.

She shook her head, her eyes grave, but her lips still smiling.

"I have brought Joey to you—but—I cannot stay. I am going away. Will you keep my boy until I return?"

"You are going away?"

She bent her head.

"I am going to take Wanza back East. I want to go away for a time—it is best for me to go. But—you must not be separated from Joey all this long winter, David Dale. My boy shall

stay with you—and in the spring I shall come for him—or come back to stay at Hidden Lake."

"You are going away—soon—after Christmas?"

"To-morrow. We are going to-morrow—Wanza and I—we decided it only to-day. I have some matters to attend to in New York. I must go at once."

"Christmas Day?"

"Yes."

"Wait—do not go—stay with me as my wife, my wife! I have sold my book—I am free too, of an old, old shadow. Oh, I have much to tell you—much to talk over with you. Wait—let me read to you some letters."

My voice was rough with emotion. She held up her hand.

"When I come back, David Dale, my friend—not now. We need to gain perspective—you and I. I have been through an ordeal—I am shaken—I am not myself. I don't see clearly. And as for you—David Dale, there is much for you to learn."

"What do you mean?" I cried brusquely.

She smiled at me sweetly and a little sadly.

"Oh, you are a stupid blundering David." She shook her head. "But—wait till spring."

"There is so much I want to say—explain," I stammered.

"Wait till spring."

"But I cannot keep Joey. I cannot let you go without your boy."

"He will be better off with you."

"I cannot accept such a sacrifice."

On this point I remained firm. We argued. Haidee entreated, and Joey begged to be allowed to stay. I would not listen to either voice. I arose at last.

"Joey," I said, speaking slowly, in order to steady my voice, "I have one more bolt to put in the sled I am making for you. Will you come to the workshop with me?"

And in the shop away from every eye, I said good-bye to my lad. And as I kissed him the old doubt stirred. Was I so sure he was Haidee's child?

Old Lundquist came for Haidee; and we said a conventional good-bye beneath his prying eyes.

Until twelve I waited and watched for Wanza, expecting every instant to hear Captain Grif's voice at the door, and to see Wanza step over the threshold. Surely she would not go without some last word to me. But she came not.

CHAPTER XXIV

"THE FLOWER WILL BLOOM ANOTHER YEAR"

I SAT by my fire throughout the long night. When dawn came I rose, went to the door and threw it wide and stepped outside into the unstained air of the morning. There was a carpet of snow on the ground, the bushes were like gleaming teepes, and the limbs of the pine trees were weighted with icicles. I repeated to myself Thoreau's words: "God exhibits himself in a frosted bush to-day, as much as he did in a burning one to Moses."

The light was purple and cold and solemn, the moon still hung in the gray of the western sky, but in the East there was a glorious band of crimson and the mountain tops looked as if aflame with little bonfires. As I stood there a ruby-crowned kinglet fluttered from twig to twig of the elderberry bush hard by, emitting its bright "zei, zei," and a chickadee answered with a merry "chickadee-a-dee, dee, dee," from the yew grove. I waited. I was praying the kinglet would sing. And presently the tiny thing began.

It poured forth its strong sweet notes in a succession of trills.

"Bird," I said, "you are a wonder. I know that the muscles in your throat are almost microscopic. I have always told Joey—" But here I ceased to admonish the bird, I went back up the porch steps.

As I was closing the door I heard the rattle of the stage as it passed along the river road on its way to the village. The driver shouted a merry Christmas to some one on the road. I threw a fresh log on the fire and sat down heavily in my chair. It was Christmas morning—and they had gone!

I drowsed after a time, lying back in my great chair with the collie asleep at my feet. When I awakened the sun was high, and the world outside my window was so sparkling and bright that it dazzled my sight. I went to the kitchen, kindled a fire, and opened the kitchen door to let the collie out. I was washing my hands at the wash bench in the corner, when I heard the latch of the door click. Footsteps crossed the floor, some one was coming up behind me saying:

"I have brought a chicken pie for your dinner, Mr. Dale—Dad'll be along soon—and I wish you a Merry Christmas."

It was Wanza.

She stood there as she had so often stood before, a white-covered basket on one arm, the other filled with bundles. But her face was pale today, and her glorious hair was swept straight back from her brow and tucked away beneath a net, and her apparel was sober gray. I stared at her and stared and stared, until the pink ran up in her cheek and she dropped the bundles and set down the basket, that she might put her hands over her abashed face. I stood there and felt shaken and dumbfounded, not attempting to speak, afraid indeed of the sound of my own voice.

The fire crackled. Cheerily through the door Wanza had left open behind her, came the chickadee's note. The sunlight was dazzling as it struck into my eyes from the white oilcloth on the kitchen table. The room seemed suddenly illumined, the air electric and revitalized. At length I stammered out:

"Thank you, thank you!"

"It's only chicken pie," she whispered.

"Thank you for not going."

At that she threw up her head, her hands dropped. She said proudly:

"Did you think I'd go on Christmas Day?

Did you think I'd have the heart to go, Mr. Dale?"

"Yes," I said wearily, "I thought you had gone, Wanza. Why not?"

"And I'll tell you why not! It's because you decided Joey was to go that I could *not* go. I could not go and leave you when I found Joey was to go—oh, no!"

"But you must go some day, Wanza," I said, scarce knowing what I said.

"And why must I go some day? Why must I? I tell you what I'm going to do, Mr. David Dale, I'm going to stay on here in Roselake, and I am going to live up to the very best there is in me. I am going to improve and grow big and fine and womanly. I'm going to do it right here. And then maybe some day," she sighed, "when Dad does not need me any more, and you do not need me any more, I will have enough money saved up, and I will go away and get educated."

In her excitement she had pressed closer to me and laid one hand against my chest. I placed my own hand over it as I said very gently:

"Let me teach you, Wanza—be my pupil. I will become your tutor in earnest, if you will have me. Yes! I will go to your father's house every day to instruct you,—and it will give me great

happiness. Ah, Wanza, now that Joey has gone I feel so futile—so useless! Let me undertake your education, child."

The burning eyes came up to mine, and questioned them. The pale face flushed. There was a pathetic tremulousness about the lips.

"Say yes," I urged.

Her head drooped, lowered itself humbly until her hair brushed my arm, and suddenly she kissed my hand, passionately, gratefully. "Oh, Mr. David Dale," she breathed, "you're grand! That's what you are. Yes and yes, and yes!"

And so I ate my dinner with Wanza and Captain Grif sitting opposite me at the table, and Wanza flouted me when I would have served her too liberally with the most succulent bits of the pie, and Captain Grif rallied me when I confessed that I had small appetite, and produced a bottle of root beer and a bag of cheese cakes from the basket.

Night came down at last to my weary soul and soon after it grew dark Wanza and her father departed. I locked the door behind them and I threw myself, dressed as I was, on my bunk and buried my head in the pillows. The evening wore on. The fire sputtered and burned low, the wind came up and hissed around the cabin. A

coyote howled from some distant hill. The room grew dark. A pall was on my heart.

As the winter wore on I became vastly interested in Wanza's education. I gave two hours each day to her lessons. And not many evenings passed without lessons in the snug little room beneath the eaves of the cottage she called home. There with our books open before us, beneath the light from the swinging lamp, we pored over tedious pages shoulder to shoulder, smiled on by old Grif and encouraged by Father O'Shan, who ofttimes shared our evenings.

It was wonderful the improvement I marked in Wanza as the weeks slipped past. Her English improved markedly. She was painstaking and indefatigible. She applied herself so assiduously that I began to fear lest she should overwork, as the warm spring days came on.

"Don't study too hard," I cautioned her one day.

"I can't study too hard," she flashed back at me. And then she smiled. But I knew she was terribly in earnest.

It was that same day that Father O'Shan quoted to me, as we were walking along the river road together:

"THE FLOWER WILL BLOOM"

"Shed no tear—Oh, shed no tear!
The flower will bloom another year.
Weep no more—Oh, weep no more!
Young buds sleep in the root's white core."

"Do you mean that for me, Father?" I asked.

"For you—yes. And many like you."

My heart swelled. I looked about me. Buttercups were gilding the sod—the pussy willows were in bloom along the river. It was the spring.

I went home and raked the dead leaves and pine needles away from under the trees in the Dingle. A few yellow violets were springing up. From beyond the syringa thicket a faint "witchery, witchery, witchery," greeted my ears.

I went forward cautiously. Peering through the interlaced branches I saw the songster. He was swinging on a thorn bush, a wonderfully brilliant little chorister in his black cap and yellow stole. I whistled. He cocked his head on one side, fixed me with his bright eye, then flew to a willow tree and favored me with another burst of song. This time he seemed to oft repeat, "Which way, oh?" He sang it so persistently that presently I replied, "Straight on, sir."

I went to the cabin and consulted the calendar. It was the last day of March.

My spirit, that had seemed earthward crushed for months, grew lighter in the sweet spring days that followed. I took the return of April as a long-fore-gone right. I ploughed and planted, I made bird-houses and arranged bird-baths in the groves hard by the cabin. I paddled in my canoe on the river, and fished in the adjacent creeks. And I went with Wanza through the woods on many a trillium hunt.

Sometimes almost to breathlessness I felt Wanza's charm, the galvanism she could always transmit to those with her intensified by some new strange quality I could not name. It was like a fillip given my dispassion. When she laughed and chirped to the squirrels, when she carried a wounded bird in her breast, when she stood on tip-toe, her face like a taper-flame, to greet the whole outdoors with wide-flung arms, I caught my lip between my teeth and watched her with observant eyes. Her beauty grew. Even Father O'Shan remarked it. The gowns of pink she wore once served to deepen the rose tint in her fair cheeks; but her cheeks needed no such service now; they were like a red-rose heart. She had taken to smoothing and banding her hair and twisting it back behind her small ears with big shell pins. Her head seen thus was as lovely

a shape as any Greuze ever painted. She frequently wore thin blouses of white, and I seldom saw her feet in sandals—she had a sleeveless black gown that she wore to a country dance one evening when I was her escort. Looking at her that night I could scarcely believe it was Wanza, my old friend and playmate whom I was in attendance upon, and I paid her some rather silly compliments and was promptly rebuked for my gallantry.

It was a tidy enough fortune my dear old father had left me. I had been able to do many things to make Wanza and Captain Grif comfortable and happy during the long winter. Among other things I had purchased a piano for Wanza to replace the old melodeon, and delighted Captain Grif with the gift of a phonograph. And last, but not least, I had made the last payment on the little cottage in which they lived and presented the deed to Captain Grif on his sixty-fifth birthday.

Dear Captain Grif! His manner of accepting this last gift was characteristic.

"Tain't for myself I'd take it. I'd just about as lief worry along and save and scrimp toward makin' the final payment— I 'low I'd *sooner;* I like the glory, and when you have a soft thing

handed to you there ben't nothin' achieved. I'm meanin' it, s-ship-mate. Things we earn is the things we 'preciate. But I take it kindly of you. And for Wanza's sake I thank you and accept. 'Tis hard on the gal—pinchin' and scrimpin'—and peddlin' in winter is about played out—the roads is in bad shape for gettin' about, you'll 'low. Now with the house paid for, the gal'll have what she earns for ribbons and furbelows and trinkets. And ownin' sech a face as hern, Mr. Dale—though it don't need no adornin'—sure makes a gal long for fixin's. I'm grateful and pleased for her sake—I sure be." Tears dimmed his kind old eyes. His hand came out to me. "Shake hands, David Dale, man; you're a friend—a friend. We need friends—the gal and I—seems like we need 'em more'n we used since all we been through,—and I want to say right here that Wanza never would'a perked up if it hadn't a been for your helpin' her this winter. She was pretty well down, Wanza was. Well, in my youth, young folks was different. I used to think—I used to think one time—well, there, by golly, s-ship-mate, it makes no difference *what* I used to think! I was mistook, I 'low. It sure is great for a man and gal to be such friends as you and Wanza—no foolishness—no tomfoolery!

"I'M GRATEFUL AND PLEASED"

—it's unusual—I ain't sayin' that it tain't—but it's fine, s-ship-mate, it's fine."

Through the winter I had had frequent letters from Haidee—frank, friendly letters, filled with stories of Joey—and a few printed epistles from the lad; one in particular that impressed me; "Joey is all rite," it said.

I discussed this with Wanza, who said tearfully:

"His saying that makes me think he isn't. He is such a plucky little chap. He would not have you worrying. Not that I think he's sick—sure enough sick, you know; but I just feel sure he's pining."

"Please—please, Wanza, don't put that thought into my mind," I said hastily. "If I thought Joey were happy I could more easily bear his absence."

She looked at me and shook her head. Then she smiled.

"He'll do well enough till spring. But he will be counting the days, all right."

CHAPTER XXV

MY SURPRISE

WHEN May came I began to look forward in earnest to the return of Haidee and Joey. Every day since the beginning of spring I had gone to Hidden Lake to tend the vines and shrubs that I had set out with so much care the previous fall. I had also made a flower bed and planted the seeds of many old-fashioned flowers—larkspur, Sweet William, marigolds, phlox, lobelia, clove pinks and mignonette, sweet peas and rosemary. In another few weeks the little cabin would be surrounded by bloom.

A Vigor's wren was building a nest in the pergola, and a calliope humming-bird's nest hung on a pine limb near the kitchen door, not more than eight feet above the ground. I could scarcely wait for Joey to see the latter. The hours I spent at Hidden Lake were filled with strange anticipations, and unanswered questions and grim wonderment.

But Fate had a surprise in store for me.

One day as I stood looking at the hummingbird's nest a man approached the cabin from the wood path beyond the garden. He was a hard-faced man, a grizzled, uncouth figure of a man. I took an instant dislike to him without even waiting to see his features. When he saw me he halted irresolutely. I nodded to him carelessly, and stooped to pull a stray weed from the bed of thyme beside the kitchen door. When I looked up he stood beside me.

"Good day, sir," he said.

"Good day," I returned.

"Is Mrs. Batterly to home?"

"No," I replied, "Mrs. Batterly is in the East."

"Is her cabin shut up?"

"It is," I said curtly.

"Well, I swan! Say, did she take the kid with her?"

"She took the little boy with her, certainly."

He grinned, showing blackened teeth and unsightly gums. "Um," he said, half shutting his red-lidded eyes, "um, um—you're Mr. Dale, I take it; I have seen you in the village."

"Yes, I am David Dale," I answered straightening up. "Is there anything I can do for you?"

He guffawed. "No," he chuckled, "you can't do a darn thing for me, but you bet your gosh darned boots I can do something for you."

I turned away in disgust.

"Say, partner," he pulled me round to him by the sleeve, "I reckon that Mrs. Batterly took the kid with her thinking the kid was hern. Well, he ain't!"

I gaped at him. He grinned at me in a would-be friendly manner.

"My name's Bill Jobson. I'm a miner," he volunteered.

"That means nothing to me," I told him sharply.

"Well, now, I don't suppose it does! See here! I'm the man as helped Randall Batterly kidnap your boy, Joey— Wait a minute, wait a minute! Don't get excited. It was a frame up—the whole darn thing! Batterly never had no idea the kid was his. He framed the whole thing up to get a rise out of his wife. He was set on getting her back, and he took that way of doing it. He knew mighty well the kid warn't his. His own boy died from an over-dose of medicine Batterly gave it one night when he was drunk, on board the ship him and me was on going from Alaska to Seattle. The boy died in

my arms, and was buried at sea. Batterly wouldn't go back to Alaska and face his wife and tell her the truth about the child. He made me swear not to squeak. And he went back, and he let on to his wife that the child was never seen after the collision between our ship and another. in the fog, off Cape Flattery. He told his wife as how a nurse on board ship had the babe in her stateroom, caring for it, the night of the wreck. There was a nurse on board who was drowned that night, so the story passed muster."

I watched the man with fascinated eyes as he sat down on the doorstep, filled his pipe leisurely, and struck a match on his boot heel. The full import of his statement did not sink into my brain at once. When it did I said, speaking with dry lips:

"But what about the mark on the lad's chest?"

"That's what you call a coincidence, partner—that and their age seeming to be the same. When Batterly saw the mark on the kid's chest the whole blame plan came to him quick as lightning, he said. And when the girl, Wanza Lyttle, told him as how he was picked up by a fisherman over on the Sound, that settled it. He took a chance on his wife's not remembering the

mark on her kid's chest was just over his heart. This kid's is higher up."

Completely unmanned, I sat down on the step beside my visitor, and rested my head in my hands. "It does not seem possible your story is true," I groaned.

Bill Jobson brought his hand down hard on my knee. "Look ahere, Mr. Dale, do you think I tramped way over here from Roselake to see Mrs. Batterly just because I wanted a country stroll? Well, I didn't! Get that through your head—quick! I'm a busy man— I oughtn't to have took the time to come and say my say as I have—"

"Will you write a statement and have it witnessed, and send it to Mrs. Batterly?" I interrupted.

"I will that. And I'll tell you why I'm doing it. I'm doing it because I used to see the little chap with you in the village last summer and I saw him after that in the fall with Mrs. Batterly, and he never run and skipped as he did with you. It just got me for fair—it did! I've been intending all this winter to see Batterly's widder and tell her the gosh darned truth, but I been working in the Alice mine, a good fifty mile from Roselake, and I ain't been down but once before since

fall, and that time I—well, I got pickled, partner, I sure did! I wa'n't exactly up to holding lucid conversation with folks, you might say."

I was silenced.

That night the statement was written in the presence of Captain Grif, Wanza, and Father O'Shan, and it went forward with a letter from me to Haidee.

Wanza and I waited impatiently for a return letter from Haidee. But the days went past like shadows, and no letter came. I had been climbing upward toward the summit of comparative peace, I had almost reached it when Bill Jobson came with his disclosure. But now, hearing nothing from my wonder woman, the valley closed around me. I walked in a stagnant marsh, the atmosphere was that of the lowland.

One night some three weeks after the letter from Haidee should have reached me, I found myself unable to sleep. I arose and dressed, and went outside and walked along the river road toward the village. After going some distance I lay down beneath a tree in a pine grove. It was about two o'clock. A purple darkness lay all around me. The stars were like pale gems, clear and cool and polished. The Milky Way was like a fold of silver gauze. The pines stood

up very black and silent in my grove. I began to wonder why I ever slept indoors, when out in the woods I felt as though I were in God's house, a partaker of his hospitality.

I relished my bed of pine needles extremely. I began to ponder many things, the silence and the stars served to give my thoughts a strange turn, and I recalled what a well-loved writer has said: "To live out of doors with the woman a man loves is of all lives the most complete and free."

Yes, I said to myself:

> "Wandering with the wandering wind,
> Vagabond and unconfined."

Slowly I said over to myself the last verse of the song—the verse I had not given to Wanza:

> "Marna of the far quest
> After the divine!
> Striving ever for some goal
> Past the blunder-god's control!
> Dreaming of potential years
> When no day shall dawn in fears!
> That's the Marna of my soul,
> Wander-bride of mine!"

Wander-bride of mine! Was it a woman like Haidee who had suggested those lines to the

poet?— Haidee with her narrow, oval face, and brow of ivory, and slow, bell-like voice. Or had it been some elf-girl, some girl of flame with a temperament wilder than most—a gipsy thing of changing moods, and passionate phases of self-will, alternating with abnegation and tenderness,—with a face like a wind-blown flower, and a nature very human, very lovable and rare!—a girl like Wanza—say?

After a time I slept. When I awakened the horizon showed a silvery light. The purple darkness still mantled the woods and the stars still shone, but day was coming on apace. As I lay there, half dozing, and gradually becoming tranquil and restored, I heard faint footfalls and a modulated whistling on the road beyond. There was a mellowness about the whistle that was infinitely piquant, some quality that stirred me as a bird's song stirs. Doubtless some ranch hand thus early astir, I said to myself.

I had not long to speculate, for the whistler approached, left the road, and entered the grove wherein I lay. I could hear a light crackling as the invader of my solitude brushed through the growth of young scrub pines. The whistle changed to a low song, and the song was sung in a woman's voice.

It was Wanza who was coming through the pines toward me!

When she was comparatively near I spoke from my couch beneath the tree.

"Hist! Hist! Wanza!"

The song ceased. I knew she was standing stock still.

"Who—who—where are you?" her voice sounded frightened.

"I'm David Dale. And I'm not ten feet from you—follow my voice. Don't trip on the tree roots."

She came towards me slowly. I stood up and went to meet her. As I advanced a strange glee took possession of me. I was elated at this unexpected encounter, this beautiful rendezvous between darkness and dawn in the pine forest. And at the thought of a companion to watch with me the coming in of day.

I took her hand silently. We went forward to the pine tree and sat down together beneath it. Wanza did not speak. I was enchanted because she did not. I could just dimly see her face. Her head was thrown back, and I knew her eyes were lifted.

The light began to spread over the east. Soon the mountain tops were touched with orange fire.

A cool breeze sprang up, and the young hemlocks on the hillsides swayed and tossed their fringes. But the pines in our grove stood immovable and black, and the wood vistas were unlit. I heard the river, and the babble of a rillet in a draw hard by. The dulcet sounds were the only sounds we heard. The whole world seemed waiting. We sat thus for perhaps ten minutes, while the light spread over the east and the purple darkness of our grove gradually gave way to a cool gray aspect. And then the sun came up, a spurt of liquid amber in the urn of the sky, and its light trickled far out over the hills, and the stars grew pale and disappeared. The day had come.

I was exhilarated. I was filled with full measure of good will and gratification. And I glanced at my companion, to read in her face her appreciation of the miracle. She was smiling ineffably, and as I turned fully towards her, she closed her eyes. I became conscious then that I was holding out my hand to her. I looked down at it curiously, and I looked at her face, bent forward and peered at it again. Who was this companion who had shared my solitude, and by her understanding made it perfect?—who had given me quiet fellowship, sat near me in the starlight,

watched the day come in with me, and now rested within reach of my hand? Who should it be, I answered myself wonderingly, but my old friend and companion, Wanza?

She opened her lids and I saw the wonder of the sunrise in her eyes, and something mysterious and deep blended with the languor of sleep. And when she smiled at me and whispered my name, I quivered suddenly and the blood surged unbidden into my face. "Wanza," I said, "Wanza!"

"Yes?" she breathed.

"Hasn't it been wonderful, Wanza? Hasn't it been miraculous? 'Every hour of the light and dark' is a miracle, but the sunrise is the greatest one of all. It is arresting. I can never drop off to sleep again if I waken and see the sky rosy." I spoke with a fluttered haste, my words tumbling over each other in a way not at all characteristic, and when Wanza whispered: "Why, neither can I," I laughed outright joyously.

"I found a wonderful wake-robin in the woods yesterday," I began after a pause; "the petals were pink and strongly veined, and it was monstrous—monstrous! petals two inches—well, almost two inches. It must be a large-flowered

wake-robin. The trilliums have been profuse this spring. This fellow was belated—its companions are all gone."

"The robins woke up two months ago," Wanza said, shyly eager. "And they have finished their courting."

"Yes, they are very wide-awake, and business-like. But they have not finished their courting, —I am sure I witnessed a love scene yesterday."

"Not really, Mr. Dale?"

"It looked uncommonly like one."

In the growing light I saw that her face had kindled. It was lifted to mine, and she was drinking in every word. The emotion the sight of that kindled face aroused in me started a train of thought, and checked the words on my lips. Oh, in very truth there was something puzzlingly complex about my feeling for Wanza! I recoiled as from some revelation that I did not care to face as she continued to smile at me. But her eyes drew me, and I leaned forward and peered into them; and as once before I read their message, but I continued to gaze this time until the lashes swept down and the light was hid.

I walked back to the village with Wanza, and there was the tinkle of bells on cattle awake in the meadows, and the stir of sheep milling on

rocky hillsides, and the crowing of cocks and the chirp of birds to proclaim that morning had come. We were almost at the village when she put a question to me.

"Mr. Dale, do you know what day to-morrow is?"

I had been expecting the question and dreading it.

"Yes," I answered, "I know well that it is the day we have been accustomed to celebrate as Joey's birthday."

I spoke impatiently. But when I saw the tears in her eyes, I stopped there in the road and took her by the shoulders and turned her around to me ruthlessly, crying:

"Listen to me! You must be hurt, if you will, at my surliness, Wanza Lyttle! I cannot keep my tongue smooth when my nerves are ragged. We go on and on, and bear much—stoically—for weeks, months, years, indeed, and then—suddenly, we can bear no more! We reach the pinnacle of pain. We cry out—with the poignancy of it. But after that, I have a fancy, we can never suffer so much again. I am at the pinnacle. There is no last straw for me. It has been placed. After to-morrow the worst will be

over. God! let me get through the day and play the man."

She said not a word. We parted silently. But after I had gone a little way she came running after me.

"I only wanted to say, David Dale," she breathed, "I only wanted to say—"

"Yes, Wanza?"

"I only wanted to say, 'God bless you.'"

CHAPTER XXVI

THE OLD SWIMMING HOLE

AND so I came to the day that was sacred to Joey!

I began it by ploughing in the field back of the cabin. I went not near the shop. I did not venture into the cabin for lunch at noon. I had made up my mind to work doggedly till sundown and then go to the village inn for supper, and later join Father O'Shan at Captain Grif's. Someway it comforted me to think of the evening; of the snug little nook beneath the eaves; and of the welcome that awaited me there. I saw Wanza's face, in fancy—solicitous, pleased; I saw her figure there in the centre of the room, clasped by the yellow light of the swinging lamp, her hair gilded by its rays, on her cheek an eager flush. Kind heart! Dear, helpful girl! Cheerful, buoyant, valiant little wander-friend!

The sun for a June sun was unduly fervid, so that by four o'clock I was weary and dripping

with perspiration, and longing for a dip in the river. I rested, and leaning on my plough, looked away through the cedars and cottonwoods to the green of the river flashing in the sunlight. I heard the rattle of the stage on the road, and when I was certain it had passed I went to the cabin and put on my bathing suit. I went in at the back door of the cabin, and out at the front, passed through the yew grove, crossed the bridge to the shop, and so gained the river bank and my favorite swimming hole beneath the cedar trees.

The spreading trees threw a deep shade over the pool. It was almost twilight beneath their network of branches. And I was on the bank prepared for a dive before I saw a small figure below me seated on a boulder at the edge of the water, half hidden from view by the steep slope of the bank. I saw the flash of bare feet in the water. Poised ready to spring I gave a shout, "Look out," and shot out over the small figure and into the pool.

When I came up, blowing like a porpoise, the figure was standing waist deep in water and waving thin excited arms abroad. I saw the face. It was gaunt, fever-bright, and not like my lad's as I had seen it last, but it was Joey who stood there.

I lifted him up and he clasped my neck almost to strangulation, wrapping his long legs around me, and I raced with him to the house. Once inside I stripped him, seized a towel and rubbed his cold little body until it glowed, and he laughed and cried and laughed again, and clutched my neck and finally stammered:

"I got—got here! I come for my birthday—all the way from the East alone."

"Alone!"

"Yep! And I'm going to stay. Going to stay forever—Bell Brandon said so. They's a letter in my satchel for you."

I hugged him to my breast.

"But what were you doing in the swimming hole, Joey?"

He looked at me, smiled his shrewd young smile, and said:

"Washing off the dust and—and tidying myself. Let's see the cake, now, Mr. David."

"The cake?"

He nodded. "Hasn't Wanza baked it yet?"

"Why, Joey lad, we haven't any ready to-day! Can't you understand?"

His face grew blank, his eyes filled, and he shivered suddenly; he seemed to shrivel in my arms, and he turned his head away from me.

"What is it, Joey?"

"I—I—don't anybody want me?"

"Want you?" I was aghast. "There, and there, and there," I cried, giving him a rapid succession of hugs. "Doesn't this look as though I wanted you?"

"Is Wanza sick?" There was something hopeful in his tone.

"No," I said, "Wanza is very well, lad."

Again that blank look, that delicate shiver.

"We'll have a fire going in no time, lad, and a cake in the oven, and the blue dishes on the table. And say the word and I'll slap the saddle on Buttons and ride post haste to Wanza and tell her I have a wonderful, wonderful surprise for her—that Joey has come back, after we had given up hoping. I'll bring her here—shall I, Joey?—to help bake the cake. Oh, dear, dear lad!—" I cried, and broke down.

Such a shout as he gave. He had me by the neck and was clinging to me like a wild young savage. "You didn't get my letter—you didn't, you didn't!"

"Did you write, Joey?"

"Yep, sure I wrote. Course I wrote. Soon as Bell Brandon told me I belonged to you really and truly I wrote and I let Bell Brandon put a

letter in the envelope with mine. I put your name on the outside. I printed Mr. David, as careful, and Bell Brandon watched me. She made me write Dale on it, too. But when she wasn't looking I rubbed out the Dale part, and I mailed it myself on the corner. I told you to spect me on my birthday, and Bell Brandon told you to meet me at Spokane 'cause I was coming all alone from Chicago."

Poor lad! Poor disappointed lad! He gave a strange, tired sigh, but meeting my somber eyes, brightened. "I like traveling alone. Pooh! I'd liever travel alone than—than anything. But when you didn't meet me at Roselake even, I thought—I thought p'r'aps you didn't want me! And when I got out of the stage at the meadow and cut across, and peeked at the cabin and you wasn't around, I was 'most sure you didn't want me. And then I saw how dirty I was, and I thought I'd tidy up first before you saw me, anyhow."

I went back to the river bank, sought for and found Joey's traveling bag and carried it to the house. Joey brought out of its depths a letter and handed it to me. But I did not read it at once. I put my lad in a big chair in the kitchen, and I built a fire in the stove and I set out flour

and sugar and molasses, all the while praying that Wanza would appear. I laid the table in the front room with the best blue china, and I got out the pressed glass comport; and I gathered handfuls of syringa and honeysuckle, and brought them in the big yellow pitcher to Joey, saying:

"You may arrange these, Joey, for the table."

But to my surprise he took the flowers listlessly, and when I glanced around after a few moments I saw that he had set the pitcher down on the floor and was leaning back in the chair with closed eyes. I went and stood at his side, but he did not open his eyes.

"Tired, Joey?"

He yawned. "Terrible tired, Mr. David."

I looked at him irresolutely, then gathered him up in my arms.

"Come along, old fellow, lie down on your bed in the cedar room, and sleep till supper's ready," I suggested.

His hand stroked my cheek with the old caress. He yawned again. I lifted him and carried him to the cedar room and placed him on the bed. I took off his shoes and drew the shawl flower quilt over him. He spoke then:

"Tell Wanza when she comes, to wake me first

thing. I love Bell Brandon—but I love Wanza best. I guess—I'll—sleep pretty good—with this dear old quilt over me—" his voice grew indistinct, he stretched, blinked once or twice, closed his eyes, and snuggled luxuriously into his pillows. I tiptoed from the room.

In the front room I sat down by the window, took Haidee's letter from my pocket and read it.

"I hope nothing will prevent you from meeting Joey in Spokane," I read. "I have heard nothing from you on that point. But I am almost sure you received my letter telling you of my illness and inability to travel, and asking you to meet Joey on the fifth. I cannot but believe Bill Jobson's story—strange as it seems. My own little boy is gone forever.

"When you receive this Joey will be with you—there in the old place that he loves so dearly. And you—how you will rejoice to have your lad again. Bless you both! David Dale, I shall not visit Hidden Lake this summer,—I have learned much in these past months. Do you not know your own heart yet? I have read carefully, searchingly all the letters you have written me this past winter, and I find Wanza, Wanza, between the lines. She is the true mate for you—can you not see this? Do you not feel it? Do you not know you love her—as she loves you? I knew I should reach a happy solution of our problem—given the much needed perspective; and the solution is this—you love Wanza Lyttle, and I care for you only as a dear, kind friend.

"No, I shall not visit Hidden Lake this year. Perhaps next summer—but 'To-morrow is a day too far to trust whate'er the day be.' I shall never forget Joey or you, or your wonderful kindness and friendship. Good-bye, Mr. Fixing Man,—or not good-bye! au revoir. Oh, all the good wishes in the world I send to you and Joey—and Wanza.

"JUDITH BATTERLY."

When I finished this letter I sat quietly, watching curiously a white butterfly—a Pine White—skimming back and forth above a flowering currant bush that grew close to the window. I found myself strangely impassive. I said to myself that Haidee was mistaken about my feeling for Wanza; but I experienced no sense of bereavement because she had found that her own feeling for me was that of a friend, merely. I was not even surprised. "I have Joey," I kept repeating over and over to myself, hugging this comfort to my breast. There was a fear back of my exultation in the lad's possession. A fear that was strong enough to force the full significance of Haidee's communication into the background of my mind. Was my lad ill? Was he really ill? I asked myself. He was thin, and his cheeks were feverishly bright, and his voice sounded tired,—but, was he a sick child?

I went back to the kitchen, looked at the ingredients set forth on the table and then out of the window anxiously. If only Wanza would come and a wonderful spice cake could be in the oven when Joey awakened. If only— But here I broke off in my musings, for I heard a strange sound from the cedar room.

I went as fast as my feet could carry me to the room where I had left my boy. I found him lying, face downward on the floor, where he had evidently fallen when he attempted to walk from his bed to the door. I lifted him, turned his face to me, and examined it. It was flushed so deep a red as to be almost purple. His eyes were open, but he did not seem to see me, his lips were parted, the breath was hot on my face. I placed him on the bed, and he murmured unintelligibly.

I knew then that my lad was ill, indeed, and when I heard a step behind me and saw Wanza on the threshold, I ran and caught her hand. "Thank God, you have come," I exclaimed.

"They told me in Roselake Joey was back," she cried, and brushed past me to the bed.

I turned and went from the room. A few moments later she came to me.

"What has she done to him? What has she done to him?" she burst forth.

"She has done nothing, Wanza."

"Why did you say, 'Thank God'?" she cried, fiercely. "Do you think *I* can save him? Mr. Dale, he is sick—he is very sick—he has pined and pined—for a sight of you, and Jingles and Buttons. What do you think he said just now? —raving as he is. 'Will I go back soon, Bell Brandon? No, thank you, I can't eat—I guess I want Mr. David, and Jingles and Buttons, and my own little cedar room.' If he dies—David Dale—if he dies!—"

"Please—please, Wanza—"

She looked into my face, her eyes were black with emotion.

"Saddle Buttons and go at once for a doctor! I'll put Joey in a cold pack while you're gone; he's burning with fever."

"Practical, capable, ever ready to serve; lavish of her affection, staunch in her friendship, 'steel true,—blade straight,'—that is Wanza," I said to myself as I rode away.

The outcome of the doctor's visit was that I sent for Mrs. Olds. Wanza and I got through the night somehow, and the next day Mrs. Olds came. I think this strange being entertained some slight tenderness for Joey, for when she saw him lying among his pillows with heavy-

lidded eyes and fever-seared cheeks, she stooped and touched his brow very gently with her lips. Joey recognized her when she entered the room late at night in her heelless slippers and flannel dressing gown, and set her small clock on the shelf above the bed. "Mrs. Olds," he ordered distinctly, "take that clock out to the kitchen."

Taken by surprise, Mrs. Olds protested: "There, there, Joey, don't bother with me—that's a good boy. Just close your eyes and go to sleep again."

"I don't watch the clock! Mr. David says the Now is the thing. Take it out! When the birds sing I'll get up."

But the birds sang and Joey did not awaken. He slept heavily all that day. And when he aroused toward midnight he did not know me. The following day he was worse, and that night I despaired. In his delirium he said things that well nigh crazed me. His mutterings were all of me, with an occasional reference to the collie and Buttons. "I don't like to leave Mr. David alone, so long," he kept repeating. "I 'most know he wants me back again—I been his boy so long."

Presently when he sobbed out shrilly: "I just got to go back to Mr. David!" I arose precipi-

tately, quitted the room and went out to the bench in the Dingle.

But some one already was sitting there. I could see her in the light from the room. A girl in a rose-colored dressing-gown with long braids down her back, sat there, looking up at the star-filled sky through the tree branches. I advanced and she made room for me at her side. I sat down, too stunned, too grief stricken for words. We sat there in silence. Presently her uneven breathing, her sobbing under-breaths, disturbed me.

"Please—please, Wanza—don't," I begged.

"I've been praying," she stammered.

"That is well, dear girl."

"Praying that Joey will live."

"It seems a small thing for God to grant—in his omnipotence. It is everything in the world to me," I murmured brokenly. "Why, girl, if my boy lives I shall be the happiest man on God's footstool! I shall be immeasurably content. I shall ask nothing beside—nothing!"

She stirred. "Nothing, Mr. Dale—nothing?"

"Nothing."

"Oh, Mr. Dale, you think so now—but you'll be wanting *her* to come back—you can't help wanting that!"

"I am very sure I shall never ask for that, Wanza. Joey brought me a letter. She is not coming back this year."

"Not coming back?"

"She may never come again to Hidden Lake, Wanza. We may never see her again."

"But I don't understand, David Dale!—oh, I thought some day you would marry—you and she."

Her voice was uneven and very low.

"Child," I said gravely, "it is not to be. She cares for me only as a friend. And I—"

"You love her—you know you do!"

She spoke passionately.

"Wanza," I said thoughtfully, "it has been a long winter, hasn't it?"

"Pretty long," she answered, surprised.

"You have learned much this winter."

"Yes, Mr. Dale."

"And I have learned, too—without knowing it. I have learned very gradually that I do not love Judith Batterly—so gradually, indeed, that I did not realize until to-day the extent of my knowledge. She told me in her letter it was so—then I knew."

She sat very still, her head thrown back, her eyes on the sky. The stirring leaves made

shadows on her gown, the moonlight flicked through the vines above her, and her hair glittered like gilt. Her eyes were big and shining, and something on her cheek was shining, too.

"Praying—still, Wanza?" I whispered, after a time.

She put out her hand.

"Please, Wanza, say a prayer for me."

"I am praying that what you told me is true."

"It is true. Pray that I be forgiven for being a stupid, clumsy fellow, unable to appreciate your true worth—" I stopped. I was being carried on and I knew not where I desired to pause. I checked myself, and bit my lip.

"I could not offer such a prayer," I heard her say. "I am not worth anything to anybody, Mr. Dale, except to Father. I am going to try, though, to make myself all over—knowing you want me to improve, and to show you I take your kindness to heart. I think I am improving a little, don't you? I don't talk so loud, and I dress quieter—more quietly—and I speak better. Can't you see an improvement, Mr. Dale?"

"Someway, Wanza," I replied, speaking musingly, "I like you as you are—as you have always been. It is only for your own sake that I care to have you improve." And as I said the

words I realized that this thought had been in the back of my mind for some time, and that Wanza's piquant utterances and lapses in English had never jarred on me—that it was strictly true that it was only for Wanza's own sake I would have her changed.

"You like me as I am?"

The voice was incredulous.

"As well as I shall when you have finished your education, child."

"As well?"

"Yes."

"You won't like me better then?"

"No, no better, Wanza."

She rose and stood before me. The light from the open door of the cedar room was on her face, and I saw hopelessness in her eyes, and a tremulousness about her lovely child-mouth.

"You will never like me very, very much, then, I guess," she said in a low tone.

She did not give me a chance to respond to this, but turned and went away through the cedars, and I sat still, saying over to myself: "Very, very much."

And as I said the words I thrilled; my blood seemed to surge into my eyes and blind me. Something had me by the throat. It was a

strange moment. In that moment I had a glimpse of the truth—a white light illumined my seeking, groping senses. Then it was gone. I was in darkness again. But in that brief lightning space I had stood on the brink of a revelation. In the weeks and months past, through the blinding—the fervid—gleam of my feeling for Haidee I had seen Wanza but obscurely—Wanza—tried day after day by homeliest duties, and not found wanting; I had seen that she had her own bookless lore as she had her own indisputable charm; I had known that at times she swayed me; but I had never come so near to knowing my heart as in that evanescent, stabbing, revealing, moment.

As I sat there I felt a sudden sense of rest, almost of emancipation. I was weary of cobwebbed dreams, sick of straining after the unattainable. My thoughts reverted to life as it had been in the old days before the coming of the wonder woman, to the days when Joey and Wanza and I had managed to go through the tedium of our hours placidly enough. I longed to take up the old, sane routine. I was impatient with suffering that chafed and gnawed the heartstrings.

I said to myself that all that was left of my

former feeling for Haidee was admiration, reverence for her goodness, and a wonder—she was a dream woman—she would remain a dream woman always—an elusive, charming personality, something too fine for the common round of daylight duties. I thought of the poet's lines:

"I love thee to the level of every day's most quiet need, by sun and candle light."

Had I thought of Haidee so?

When I turned back to the cedar room, Mrs. Olds met me at the door with a whispered, "Joey is lucid—he is asking for you." I crossed swiftly to the bed, knelt down and took my lad's hand. He smiled at me in his old way, but his eyes went past me to Mrs. Olds. His voice was distinct as he ordered, "Go, get Wanza, Mrs. Olds, please."

I heard Wanza's step at that moment. She came softly forward and crouched beside me. "I am here, Joey," she said in her rich young voice.

"That's all right then! Wanza; if I don't get well you got to marry Mr. David."

The troubled face bending down over the gray one on the pillow, flamed. "Joey—dear!"

"Yes, Wanza," pleadingly, "cause who'll take care of him?"

I cleared my throat. "Come, lad, you will be well in a few days—up and around in the woods, feeding the squirrels."

"Yes—but if I ain't!" Tender, wistful, questioning, his loyal brown eyes sought Wanza's. "You got to, Wanza. Say yes."

The girl's voice whimpered and broke. "I can't!"

"Why, yes you can! They's no one can cook like you, Wanza. Mr. David can't live here alone when he's old—he can't live here alone no more—say you'll come and take care of him. Why, you like the birds and the squirrels—you know you do, Wanza—and you like Mr. David, too. Will you, Wanza?" The soft wheedling accents wrung my heart.

At the girl's head-shake he whispered to me, "You ask her, Mr. David."

My hand groped for hers, closed over it, gripped it hard.

"If I ask her now—if she says yes, lad—it will be for your sake—all for your sake, Joey."

The big eyes were understanding. "Go on, ask her."

"Will you, Wanza?"

She was weeping.

"Because Joey asks it—because it will ease his

mind," I heard her choked voice stammer, "only because of that, Mr. Dale—only for Joey's sake as you say—I promise if—if you need me—" she came to a dead stop.

"To marry me, Wanza."

"For Joey's sake, Mr. Dale."

"There, Joey!" I shook up his pillow and laid him gently back. "It is all settled, lad. Go to sleep now."

"Kiss me, once, Mr. David."

I kissed him.

"Kiss Wanza, now."

Weariness was heavy in his eyes, his voice was quavering and weak; and forgetting all else but his gratification, forgetting Mrs. Olds, propriety, the consequences of so rash an act, I took Wanza in my arms and kissed her lips, then stumbled blindly from the room.

CHAPTER XXVII

MY WONDER WOMAN

WHEN I saw Master Joey smiling at me wanly from his pillow the next morning, his fever gone, his eyes without the abnormal brightness of the previous two days, and heard his modest request for corn-meal flapjacks to be stirred up forthwith in the old yellow pitcher, my heart leaped into my throat for joy. I was so riotously happy that I went outside to the Dingle, and almost burst my throat with whistling a welcome to a lazuli bunting, newly arrived from his winter sojourn in the south land. He was so azure-blue on his head and back, so tawny breasted, so clear a white on his underparts that he seemed like some wondrous jewel dropped from Paradise into the syringa thicket.

I had answered his "here, here—" until I was sure he understood the cordiality of my welcome, when I heard a fluttering among the serviceberry bushes and turned to see a sage thrasher fly

out and soar aloft to a hemlock tree. I whistled. He answered with a beautiful song, and went on to imitate other birds' songs, ending by emitting a sound that was strangely like the wail of a naughty youngster. I laughed outright, and it seemed to me he was attempting to imitate my laughter as I walked away. The birds were coming back in earnest. How glorious the early summer was! Was there ever such a rose-gold morning? I was overflowing with happiness. But when on my way to the spring I hailed Wanza, who was dipping water out of the big barrel by the kitchen door, and received a delicately frigid "good morning," something rather strange came over me, my glowing heart congealed, and I went out to the yew grove, and sat down soberly on the railing of the small bridge that spanned the narrow mountain stream.

I had no quarrel with Wanza for her averted face. But I had a feeling that the blunder-god had unwarrantably interfered again, and a wish to lift my affairs up off the knees of the gods once and for all and swing them myself. I felt big enough to swing them, this morning. Only—I did not exactly understand the state of my own mind, and this was some slight detriment to clean swinging.

For one thing—after I had touched Wanza's unwilling lips last night at Joey's bidding, I had sat on the edge of my bunk in the darkness unable to forget the feeling of those warm lips against my own—feeling myself revitalized—made new. What had happened to me when I held the girl in my arms for that brief space? What was the answer?

I sat in deep thought, starting when a water ouzel swooped suddenly down past my face, and plunged into the water at my very feet. I watched it emerge, perch on a boulder further down stream, and spread its slaty wings to dry. The day was languorous, and very sweet. One of those perfect days that come early in June when the woods are flower-filled, and the trees full-leaved. The air was tangy with smells, the honeysuckle and balm o' Gilead dripped perfume, the clover was bursting with sweetness, and the wild roses were faintly odorous; all the "buds and bells" of June were dewy and clean-scented. The nutty flavor of yarrow was in the air—Achillea millefolium—the plant which Achilles is said to have used in an ointment to heal his myrmidons wounded in the siege of Troy. I marked this last flavor well, separating it from the others. "Poor yarrow," I said to myself,

"content with spurious corners and waste portions of the earth, what a splendid lesson of perseverance you teach." I thought of myself and of my struggle of the last eight years, and compared myself with the weed. I had not been content with the neglected corners of the earth; but I had honestly tried to make the best of the corners; I had attempted to improve them, and in so doing improve myself.

From that I came to Joey and the two women who had helped to make the waste places bloom; and like Byron I had a sigh for Joey and Wanza who loved me; and I had a tender smile for my dream woman—Haidee. She had come when, steeped in idealism, I was all prepared for the advent of the radiant creature who was to work a metamorphosis in my life. She had come, and I had hailed her Wonder Woman. It had been a psychological moment, and she had appeared. And I had loved her—let me not cheat myself into any contrary belief—surely I had loved her—surely; let me admit that. But no—I need not admit even that, since it was not the truth—since she knew it was not the truth. I had loved an ideal; not Judith Batterly, indeed, but a vague dream woman.

"There is no wonder woman," I said to myself, thoughtfully.

Restless with my cogitations, I rose, left the bridge, and went through the yews to the workshop.

When in sight of the bed of clove pinks I pulled myself up smartly; Wanza knelt there. I was not too far away to see the glitter of tears on her cheeks; but in spite of the tears, she was smiling; her face was downbent, rose-flushed, to the new buds, her hands were clasped on her breast, she seemed lost in ecstatic revery, and on her head rested delicately a nuthatch.

"What a wonderful way Wanza has with the birds," I said to myself. I turned this over in my mind. "I've long marked it," I added. Presently still watching her, I decided, "She is a rather wonderful child."

I continued to watch her.

She began to croon a soft little song; she unclasped her hands and held them out before her. A second nuthatch left the branch of a pine tree near by and descended to settle on her left hand. She gave an indistinct gurgle of joy, and put her right hand over it.

"Why, she's a wonder," I said to myself, "a

wonder—girl!" I hesitated, and then exultantly I murmured: "A wonder woman!" and turned and beat a hasty retreat to the cabin.

Arrived there I sat down rather breathlessly on the steps. I saw light at last!

It was under the stars that night that I told Wanza of my discovery. Joey was sleeping peacefully indoors, watched over by Mrs. Olds, the doctor had just left, after assuring me that my lad would soon be convalescent, and Wanza and I walked on the river-bank.

"Wanza," I said, "is that a russet-backed thrush singing?"

"I think so, Mr. Dale."

"His notes are wonderfully liquid and round, aren't they?" I gave a sigh of pure happiness. "I feel like a 'strong bird on pinions free,' myself to-night. I feel emancipated—as though life were beginning all over for me. I am in love with life, Wanza. I want to awake to-morrow and begin life all over."

"Do you, Mr. Dale?"

"Isn't the world beautiful washed in this moonlight! The sky seems so near—like a purple silk curtain strung with jewels. But it is quite dark here beneath the pines, isn't it, Wanza? I have to guess at the flowers under our feet.

There is white hawthorn nearby, I swear, and the yellow violets are in the grass, and the wild forget-me-not, and I smell the wild roses—"

"How you go on, Mr. Dale!"

"Wanza," I said, "look up at the stars through the pine branches."

"I like to watch them in the river."

"Yes, but look up, Wanza."

She looked as I bade her.

"The moonlight in your eyes is wonderful, child."

"Please don't, Mr. Dale."

"Keep looking at the stars, Wanza—your face is like an angel's seen thus. Your hair is like silver starshine, your lips are flowers—you are very wonderful—my breath fails me, Wanza. You are very wonderful—a wonder woman—and I love you. Will you marry me?"

"Joey isn't going to die, Mr. Dale."

"I know it."

She spoke with a sobbing breath: "Then why do you say this?"

"Because I love you with my whole soul."

"Oh!"

"Turn your eyes to me, dear. Don't look at the stars any more. Do you love me?"

"Yes."

"Then at last I shall be blessed—I shall have a wander-bride—a wonder woman—some one who understands me, and whom I understand, to share with me the coming in of day, the mystery of the night and stars, the saneness of the moon—I shall have—Wanza! Do you remember, child:

> " 'Down the world with Marna!
> That's the life for me!
> Wandering with the wandering wind,
> Vagabond and unconfined!'

"Do you remember the song I sang to you in the woods one night? There is another verse—listen!

> " 'Marna of the far quest
> After the divine!
> Striving ever for some goal
> Past the blunder-god's control!
> Dreaming of potential years
> When no day shall dawn in fears!
> That's the Marna of my soul,
> Wander-bride of mine!' "

The beautiful face was on my breast, the corn-flower blue eyes were raised to mine, the maize-colored hair was like a curtain about us, shutting out the moonlight, the night, the world. I drew

her closer, closer still, silently, breathlessly, until I heard her give a shaken cry:

"It's in your eyes—I can read it! You do love me, you do, you do! David Dale! David Dale!"

After an interval, I said:

"I am writing another book, Wanza. I am sure it will sell. We will go away from here, child—we can live where we choose—we will go south to my old home. There is some property there that is mine. You will love the old home, and the river with its red clay banks—my childhood's home. We will travel, too. Life seems very full, Wanza."

"But we'll always come back to Cedar Dale, won't we, David Dale? We'll come back to Dad—dear Dad—he'll always be waiting. And the birds and the flowers—and the squirrels and woodsy things will be waiting. And Joey will want to come."

THE END

150

150

UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY
A 000 128 034 6